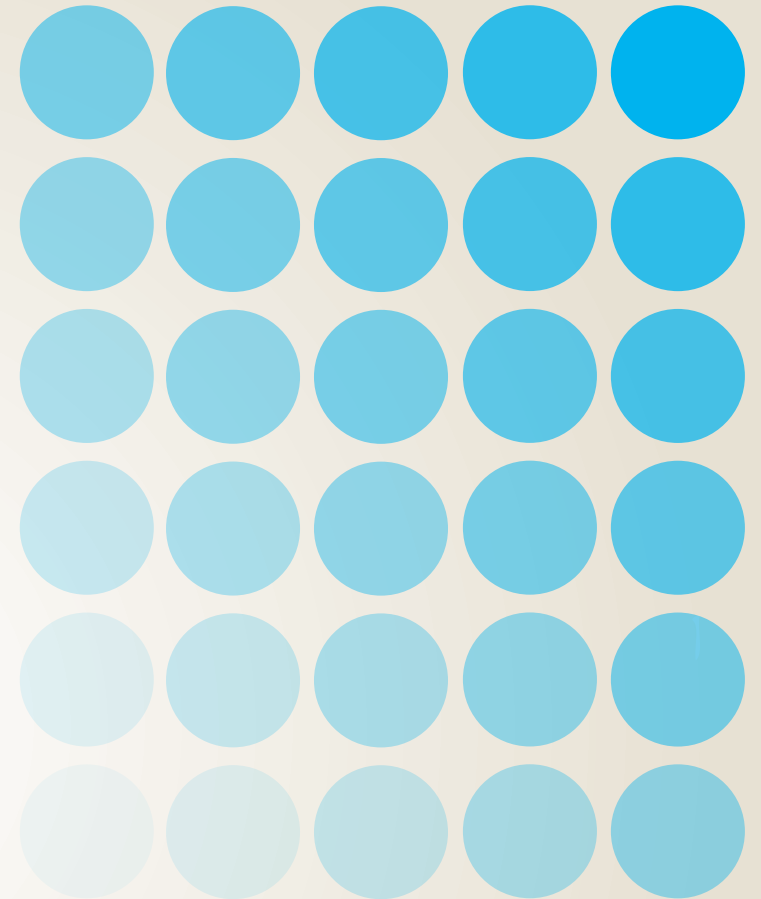


Bill Sims, Jr.



Topo

Stories About

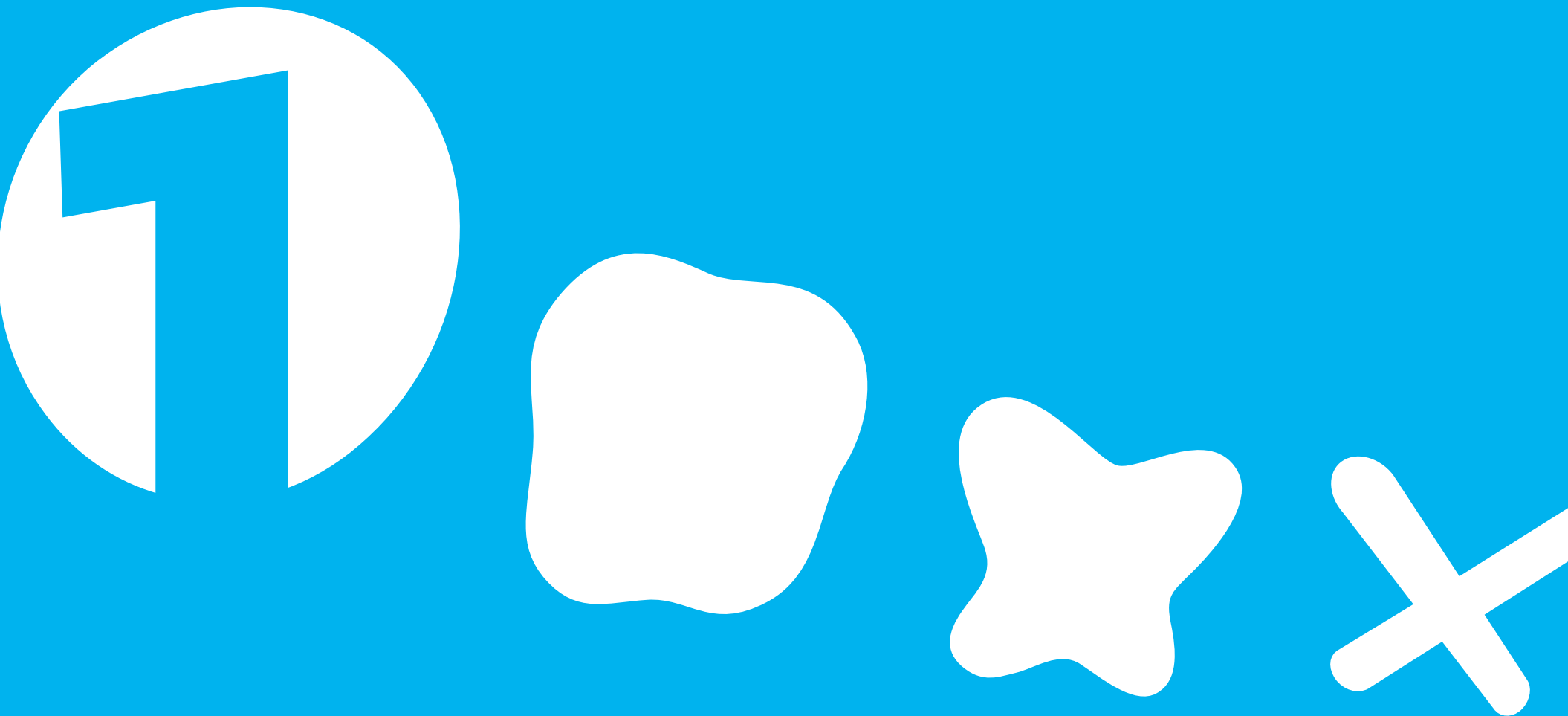
Employee Engagement

Join Bill on his travels around the world... making new friends & talking about *Green Beans & Ice Cream!*

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When Behavior Based Safety Fails: Beef Stew and the Verbal Eraser



When I was in Saudi Arabia recently, I asked how many of the 400 managers I spoke with were using a behavioral process. Over **90%** said that yes they were, in fact using one of the original systems developed by one of the largest safety consulting firms some **20+** years ago.

My next question:

“ Would you say that the feedback you give employees when you do observations is mostly **POSITIVE** or mostly **NEGATIVE**? ”



1

hand went up saying that the feedback was mostly **POSITIVE**.



399

went up to say that they mostly gave **NEGATIVE** feedback.

This was a startling discovery for me!

One of the safety managers at the conference told me more.



"Bill, we get so tired of giving negative feedback to employees that we begin dreading doing observations. In fact, management has had to give us observation quotas to meet, and threaten us with discipline. But I still have the last laugh," he said, "I just pencil whip the cards and fake the observations."

I wondered how common this problem is. Observers who see little or no value in the observation process and who either fake the observations or don't do them at all.

So I did some informal research, asking safety managers here in the USA if they were seeing negative reinforcement & pencil whipping in the world of safety observation.

The sad answer was "yes."

Why is this?

I believe it is because of a fatal flaw in the design of some of the behavioral processes most widely used today. Here is how they suggest we go about doing an observation ...

1 **First**, you should approach the employee and deliver positive reinforcement (called R+ in the language of behaviorism), and positively reinforce their safe behavior.

Then, we deliver negative reinforcement to point out the employee's at risk behaviors.

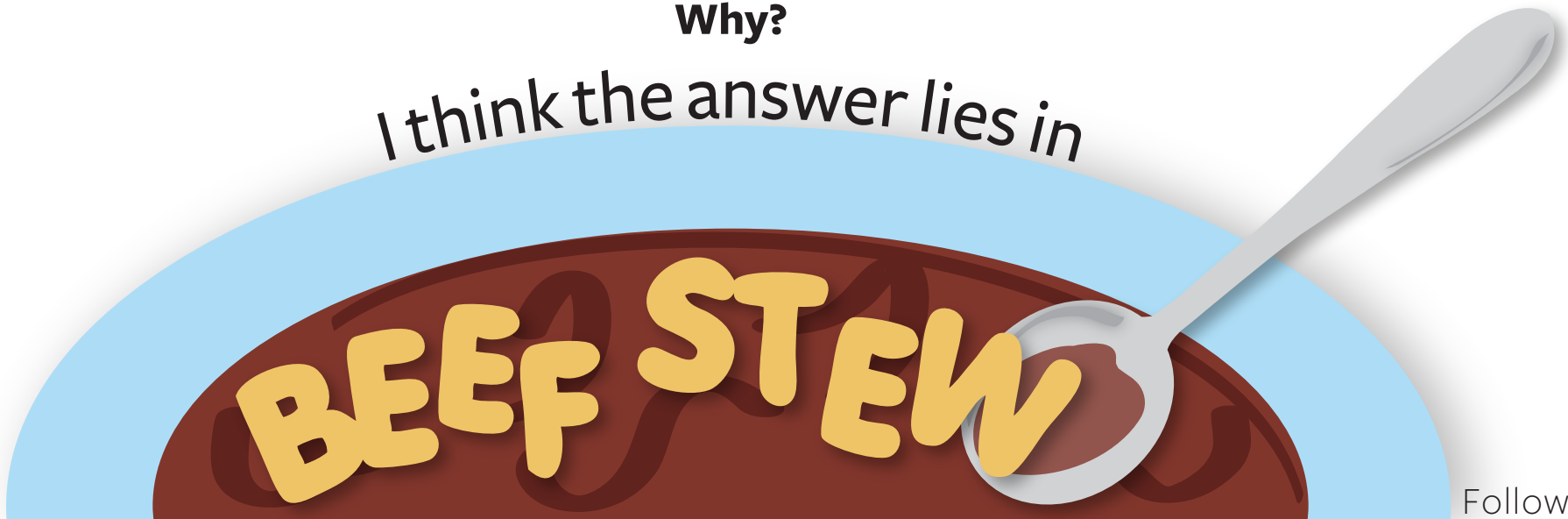
Sounds good right?

And, properly delivered it is.

But all too often it doesn't go down that way. The attempt to reinforce someone totally flops.

Why?

I think the answer lies in



You see, when I first got married to my dear wife from south Georgia I told her how much I loved Beef Stew. Mom’s beef stew was my special favorite.

And what did Margie do?

She worked the whole day to surprise me with Beef Stew for dinner one evening.



After the second helping I sat back, relaxed and said
(in my infinite wisdom),

“Dear, that was delicious beef stew . . .”

(this would have been an ideal time to shut up, but oh no, not me . . .)

“and thanks for your hard work on it today,”

“**BUT**, it would be better if you would use mom’s recipe.”

Ouch. Oops. Ouch again.

(In classical conditioning terms, my comment paired my with negative feeling for my wife, so I became an aversive stimulus—which over time, if repeated would create avoidance behavior from my wife.)



To this day I am still amazed that I didn’t wind up wearing that Beef Stew on my new suit.

After some time Margie settled down enough for me to say how sorry I was and we patched it up.

That little lesson of 22 years ago has always stuck with me, and I think it helps us understand an important Achilles heel of a poorly delivered observation process:

The Verbal Eraser – “But”

As Aubrey Daniels puts it in *Bringing out the Best in People*, when we use the word, “But,” we erase anything we have said before it.

“You did a nice job on that report Sue,
BUT, you should have tried harder.”

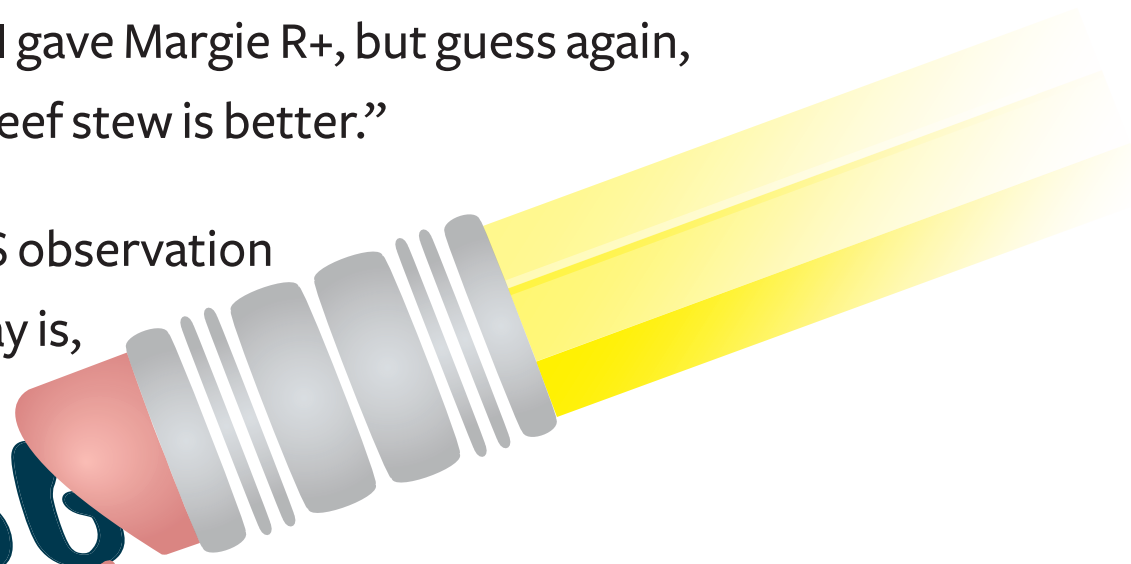
I came back from a recent speaking engagement where I scored 4.8 out of 5 (pretty good in most people’s book), but as I read through the speaker evaluations, I felt myself feeling depressed and discouraged by the 3 negative comments and I totally ignored the 422 who ranked our session favorably. I had to go read some of the positive ones to get centered again.



In the Beef Stew example, I thought I gave Margie R+, but guess again, all she heard was, “Mom’s beef stew is better.”

And in the case of poorly delivered BBS observation feedback all the employees take away is,
“What I did was wrong.”

nice job





Our, You Did It Right! card fixes this.

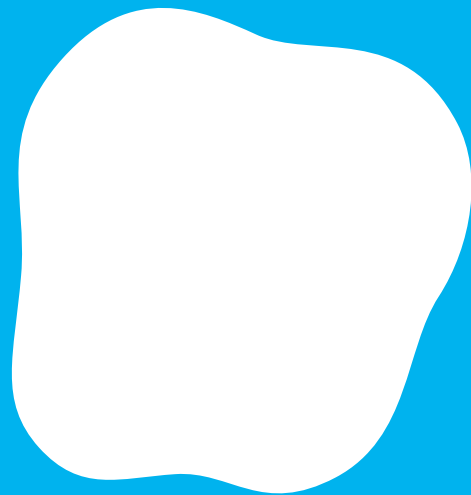
You can be sure that positive reinforcement happens and eliminate the pencil whipping.

This is precisely the idea behind our You Did It Right! card. Observers now add a second step, that of delivering positive reinforcement and feedback while we track and validate where it occurs and ensure there is no pencil whipping or favoritism.

Wish I'd have had a You Did It Right! card 22 years ago to give Margie.

I guess I better head to the jewelry store ...

May I Have the Darts
& Blindfold Please?



“ I’m trapped in a self-perpetuating nightmare Bill. ”

So began my chat with a safety manager of a Fortune 1000 company. His boss had directed him to implement a safety bingo program. Against his better judgment, he did.

“ At first, the program cut our injuries, but then we had a lost time injury (LTI), and the game ended. Then the injuries came out of the woodwork.

4 LTI’s in one week.

If that’s not a sign we have **injury hiding**, what is?
To make matters worse, I’m worried that we are sending a message to our employees that staying safe is a result of chance, or being **‘lucky’** —while I know that safety results from a pursuit of safe behavior. ”

This manager went on to lament the problems with the bingo concept.

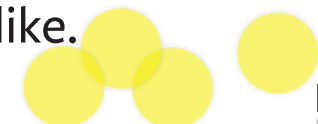
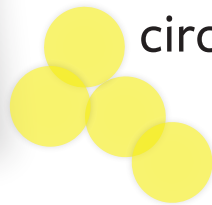
For those of you who don't understand the game, it works like this:

Every day without an injury, a number is pulled and posted by the employee time clock. A bingo jackpot is established with money or some other prize that increases each day no injury is reported (translation: hide injuries and the award prize gets bigger for all of us).

Employees are given a bingo card with a series of random 2 digit numbers and if they get a match they scratch out the number on their card.

Achieving 5 numbers in a straight line means that employee can bring the card in to claim the jackpot prize.

There are countless variations of this system that circulate—safety poker, jackpot, in house drawing programs, and the like.



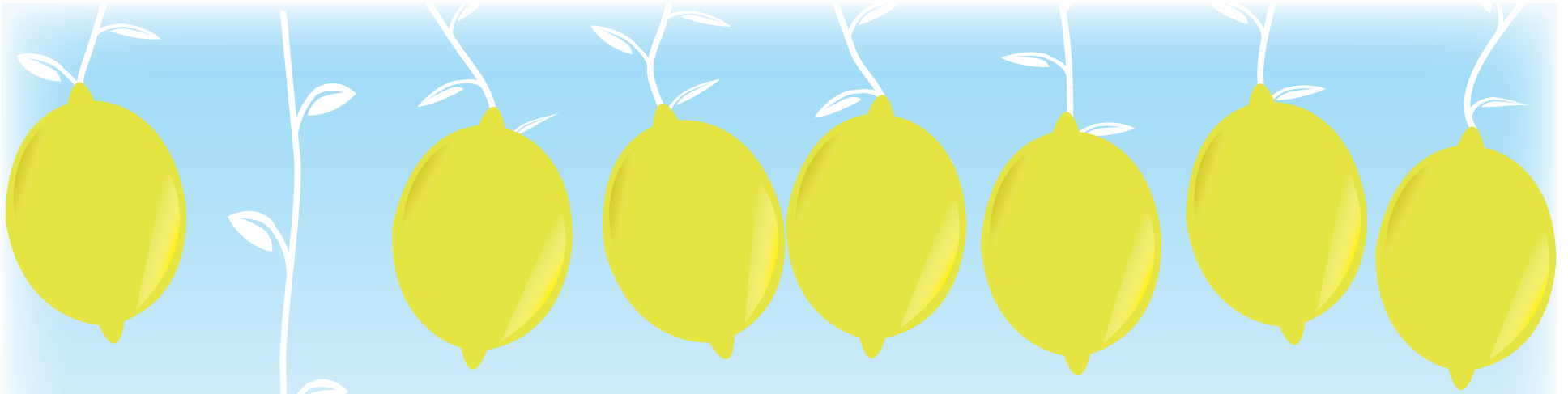
Why do these incentive approaches work out initially and then quickly fizzle out?



First, let's explore what these approaches have going for them:

- ▶ They provide feedback to tell the group how the safety record is doing,
- ▶ They provide a reward or positive consequence for improving performance,
- ▶ They provide novelty or something “new” a known factor in human behavior.

These elements help to ensure some early impact. And for many companies, these programs are their first foray into the world of incentives. They are often companies who experience many “Monday Morning Injuries” (workers who milk the work comp system to get a few days off from work with pay). Creating a system where peer pressure causes co-workers to look down on those who lose the team’s safety bonus is a highly effective way to eliminate the Monday Morning Injury. Not a few safety managers have had employees approach them to report a co-worker who is faking an injury. The bad apples are thus weeded out. And the safety record “improves” or so it may seem.



Soon, however, the “low hanging fruit” of Monday Morning Injuries disappears, and the company is left with an environment where the remaining injuries are not a result of questionable worker behavior, but are caused instead by unsafe conditions and behaviors. And these injuries are often hidden due to the peer pressure mentioned above, instead of being reported so that they can be prevented in the future.

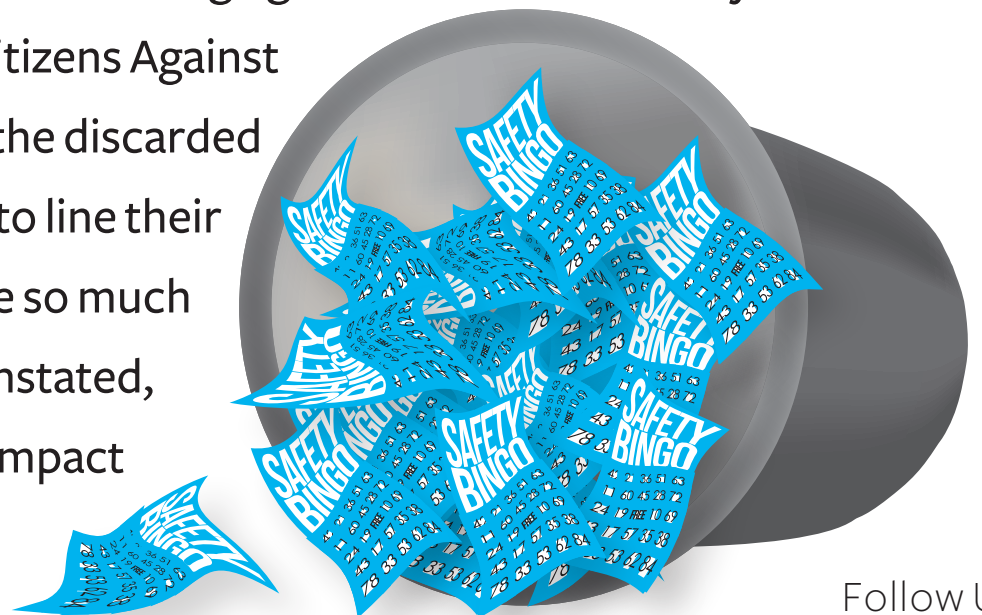
But all the old school senior managers remember is how they dropped those injuries so much with their first “incentive fix”.

“You won’t believe what they’ll do for a ball cap!” says the vintage 80’s manager. (sigh ...)

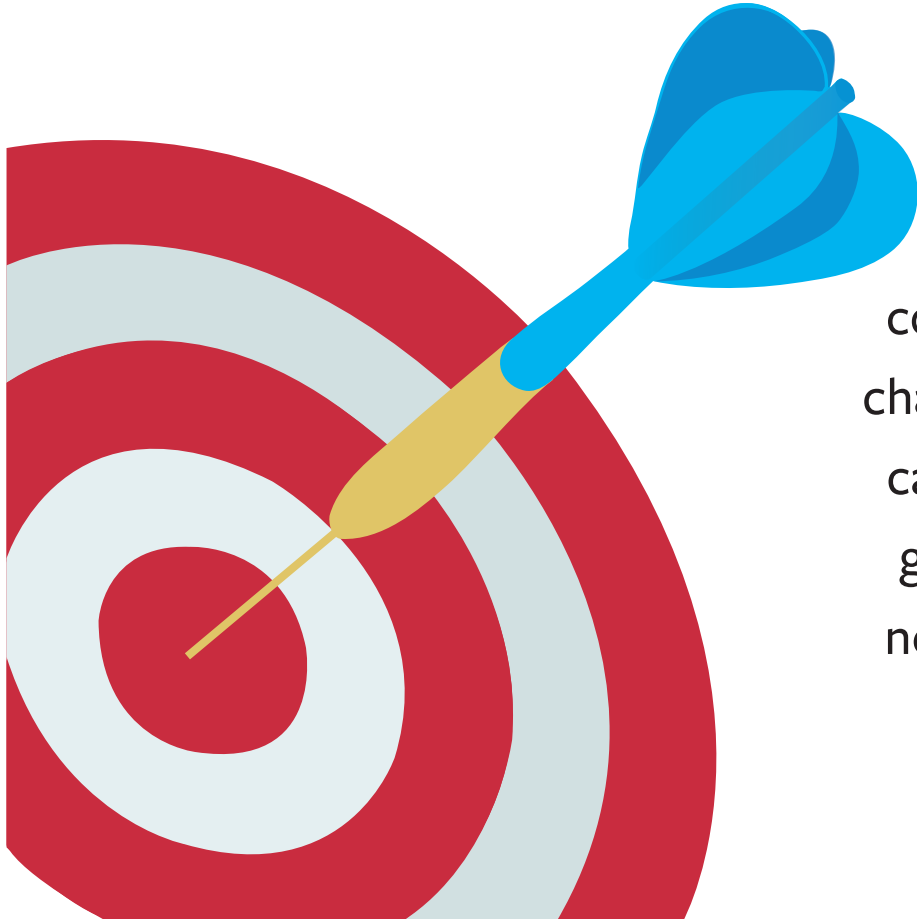
Another problem with games of chance is that one person wins, while everyone else (or almost everyone else) loses. Due to this being an uncertain consequence, you inevitably will see a lack of interest in playing “the game”. You will begin to see Scratch off cards in the trashcan and Bingo cards on the floor.

One of my good friends Jerry Howell had a young female employee start to cry when she failed to win the “safety prize”. In a desperate attempt to assure her the game wasn’t “rigged” he went through 1800 names in the hat and told her that if her name wasn’t in the bunch, he would personally give her \$50.

Next, the disenchanted safety director announces the Bingo game is canceled . . . only to be met by a howl of protest from the CAVE people (Citizens Against Virtually Everything) who have been picking up the discarded scratch offs and bingo cards from the trashcan to line their own pockets. Frequently, these vocal few make so much noise that the game gets reinstated, although it has zero impact on behavior.

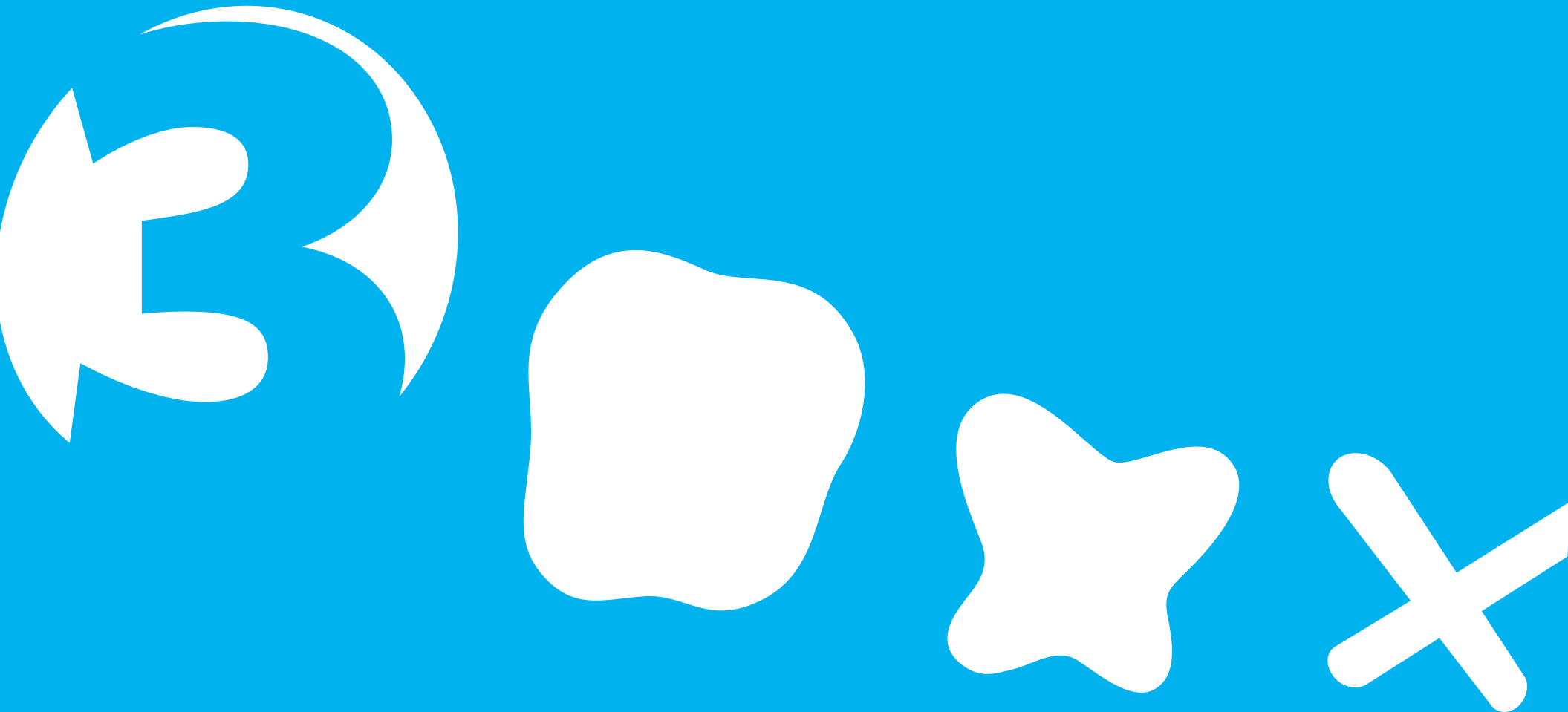


“ Bill, I swear, I could have a bigger impact on our safety performance if my boss would just blindfold me and let me throw a dart into a group of my employees, but what can I do? ”



And so my conversation with this safety director ended. I hope that someday he can convince his boss to leave behind the games of chance and lagging indicator rewards. But just in case he can't, keep an eye out for a blindfolded guy throwing darts. You might have your own near miss or worse . . . we wouldn't want you to lose your ball cap now would we?

The Great Motivational Debate



I'd just finished my workshop at the national meeting of the American Society of Safety Engineers. After my presentation, I was approached by a senior consultant with one of the biggest behavioral consulting firms; he immediately hit me with a really heavy behavioral question . . .

“Aren't you worried about robbing people of their intrinsic motivation by giving them gifts like iPods and other tangible reinforcers? ”

“What about the jobs where there are NO intrinsic reinforcers? ”
I responded. He stared back at me, puzzled.

For instance, what if I work at a theme park and the desired job behavior is for me to smile and make eye contact with guests, or voluntarily help co-workers (a core trait of engaged employees). I do this for awhile, but my supervisor never says “Thanks,” or notices my extra effort. What happens to INTRINSIC motivation then?

The consultant's theory of employee motivation had sadly met the real world of business—whether he liked it or not. The world of work positively and negatively reinforces us 24x7. How much intrinsic reinforcement can you feel when your good work is ignored?

I Search for Answers


I felt like I held my own in this discussion, but it deepened my curiosity about the reason psychologists and consultants had disagreements about the way employees respond to extrinsic reinforcement. I asked my friends in the behavioral world to help me understand this controversy.


They told me to read a book by Alfie Kohn, who I learned is kind of like Darth Vader to Behaviorists . . . he feels that intrinsic human motivation is where the rubber hits the road; he takes a bunch of intellectual shots at BF Skinner and other behaviorists.


Cool! So, there's this whole great debate about why we do what we do. It seems that the battle between the Cognitive psychologists and the Behaviorists has raged for quite awhile. And ne'er the twain shall meet.

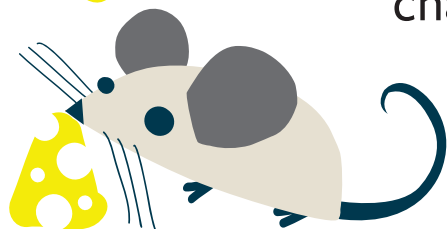


For those of you who want the short version of the Cognitive vs. Behaviorism Wars, here it goes . . .

 Behaviorists, followers of BF Skinner, believe that everything we do is a result of what happens to us after we do it. I'm thirsty, so I open up my water bottle and take a sip. I can't see, so I turn the lights on.

 They argue (rightfully so) that if the lights didn't come on (positive, immediate & certain consequences or PIC) then pretty soon I'd forget the light switch and carry a flashlight. And, they are right. The other neat thing about behaviorism is that we can directly observe, measure & quantify behaviors, because unlike thoughts, we can see them.

 The behaviorists believe that extrinsic reinforcement is not only a good thing, but it is the best way to motivate people. If you want better performance and behavior change—you need to make sure the consequences are positive. They believe in extrinsic motivation.



Now the Other View

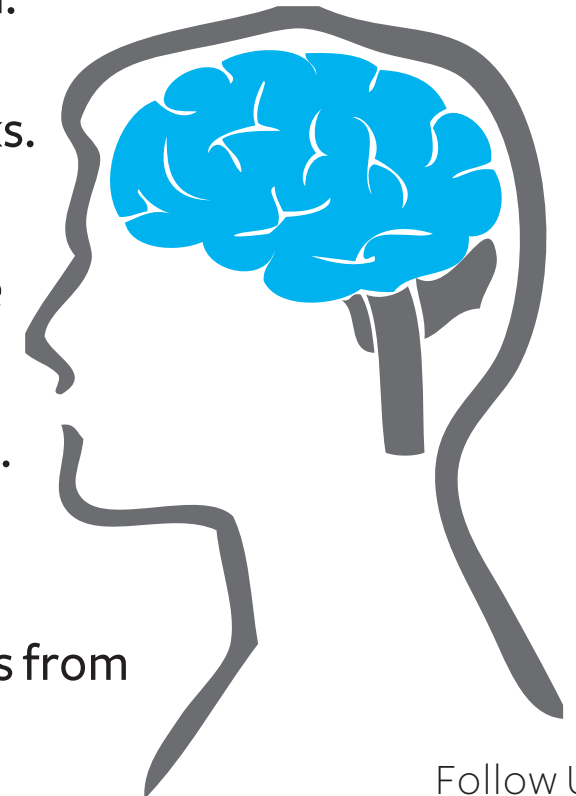
Cognitive psychologists believe that thinking plays a bigger role in why people behave. They talk about intrinsic motivation and recoil at the thought that human behavior is simply caused by consequences. What about expectations and goals?

Alfie Kohn, in his book, *Punished by Rewards*, pours out some very passionate arguments about how giving people praise, rewards and gifts really robs them of their ability to do their best. He says it takes away their intrinsic motivation.

He cites studies with school kids who earn pizza by reading books.

True, the pizza incentive increased performance, but once you take it away, the kids have less desire to read than they did in the beginning. The study implies that kids will read more if you let them do it because they want to, not because you reward them.

What if they don't want to?



Alfie Kohn advocates the removal of verbal praise and rewards from schools, parenting and management.

I felt kind of like Luke Skywalker while reading Alfie's book...

I was really worried, and felt the pull of the Dark Side.

Could it be that we are really hurting ourselves by rewarding and reinforcing good behaviors?

The Rewards of Rewarding

Then I thought about my own career as a sales person (I noted that the cognitive studies chose school kids as their subjects, and steered a wide path around sales people.)

The sales incentive industry is like the green giant of the incentive world—billions of dollars are spent rewarding sales people with trips, iPods, golf clubs, and cash. Over the last 70 years, they have taught us a couple of interesting things...

Even when salespeople are compensated with money for every sale (a performance bonus, commission, extrinsic reinforcer, etc.) they **WILL STILL WORK HARDER AND SELL MORE WHEN AN ADDITIONAL INCENTIVE IS PRESENTED.**

What about kids and pizza? I asked my other expert, my daughter Carli.

“Remember how you could read books in elementary school to get pizza Carli?” I asked . . .



“Sure do, dad. It was fun.”

“So did getting pizza make you want to read books less?”

“No, and you still owe me a pizza, Dad.”

(I had forgotten to cash in Carli’s pizza coupon, and so I guess I provided a really big NIC (negative, immediate, certain) experience for her.)

So, did pizza make Carli less interested in reading? According to her, she felt stifled because the books that were on her reading list were boring.

They didn’t resonate with her passion: horses.

Carli went on to say that if she could have read every horse book in the world and been rewarded for it, she would have.

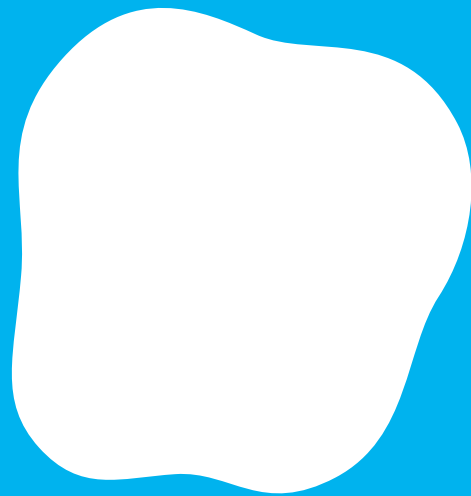
Whether it's a Medal of Honor, Purple Heart, or Mary Kay's pink Cadillac awards, humans are hardwired to respond to tangible and social extrinsic reinforcement.

Why does the Bill Sims Company advocate the use of tangibles?

Because it makes people feel appreciated and their increased performance shows it.



Why Them? Why Not Me?





Rose works for one of the top luxury hotel firms in the world. The hotel's reputation for service is legendary—and so was their approach to employee recognition, or so I thought, until I met Rose.



Doing a survey to assess the impact of recognition at work, I asked Rose,

“So how many times have you been recognized in the three years you’ve worked here?”

“Once. I was selected as ‘Best Customer Service’ in the spa,” said Rose.

“Awesome!” I said, “What did you do to earn that award?”

“I don’t know, Mr. Sims . . . maybe it was a customer survey or something? They never told me. But the worst part for me is that they surprised me in front of all my co-workers and told them that I was the best. Now, two of the ladies won’t speak with me anymore. I wish I had never won the award.”

Sound familiar?

Rose's story illustrates a common problem that plagues employee recognition efforts like Employee of the Month. I like to call that problem . . .

“ WHY THEM? WHY NOT ME? ”

In 1959, Dr. Herzberg, a renowned psychologist, discovered that recognition and achievement were the top two job satisfiers.

Money came in at number six. “Big deal,” you say. “I already know that.”

What you may not know, however, is that the top two “dissatisfiers” were money and perceived favoritism by the manager.

So, by creating an environment where employees feel that management plays favorites, you create a big group of unhappy employees who are ready to leave.

Perhaps almost as bad Rose's dilemma is the one from Martha, a customer service manager at a large trucking firm. Her 350 customer service agents had their phone conversations reviewed by the Board of Directors.

“Martha, you and your team aren't ‘wowing’ our customers. You need to come up with a recognition or reward program to turn that around!” said the president.

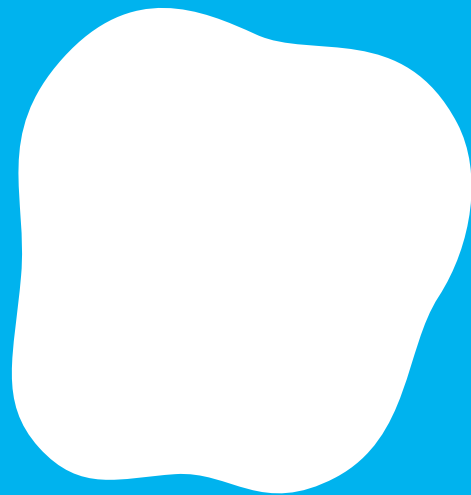
Martha asked her president to define the behaviors that would create the “Wow!” experience.

“We'll get back to you on that,” her boss replied.

Martha never heard from him again. Clearly, an obtuse, vague approach to recognition creates confusion and frustration from employees who aren't picked.

New approaches like Behavior-Based Recognition fix this problem and problems like those that Rose experienced.

When Can We Fire Our Stupid Workers?



- “ We are trying to reduce the stupid accidents that occur because employees are in a hurry, or they don't follow the safety standards. ”
- “ Every time we have an accident, I get an email from my president asking if we can fire the injured employee. In their book, it's always the employee's fault ... ”
- “ I have the dumbest employees in the world! One of my guys reached into a conveyor belt without shutting it down ... a deliberate violation of our safety rules! He almost got his arm ripped off. Boy was he dumb! ”

These are just a handful of the candid comments that a few safety people have made when I chat with them. The last one came from an ASSE meeting where the safety manager lamented people who are so “stupid” that they break obvious safety rules.

33 I told that safety director that his people aren't dumb. And while the worker with the missing arm won't make the mistake again of reaching into the conveyor belt, others will make that mistake before long.

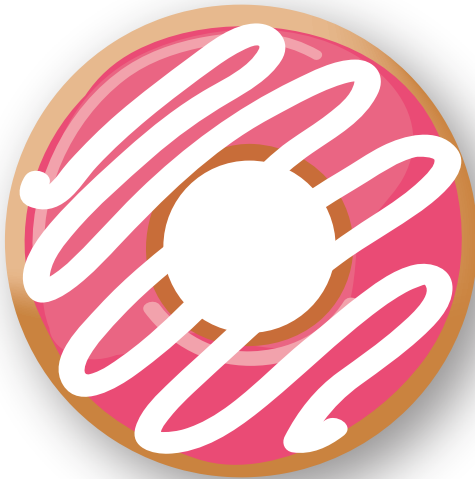
“Why do you say that?” he asked me.

Because your system has created very powerful reasons for people to break safety rules.

Any time we do something, we are getting positively reinforced for it somehow, somehow.

I eat a donut—it tastes great, so I eat another one.

I press the gas pedal, my car goes faster, and I get to where I need to be sooner.



“When your employee violated your safety rules and unjammed the conveyor without locking it out, he was getting something positive back. He was being positively reinforced for that behavior . . . can you tell me how?” I asked the safety director.

“Hmmm . . . well, he was saving time.”



And with this Aha! Moment, together, we began to unravel the behavior of the “stupid” worker.

You see, by saving time, the worker got more work done. And when he got more work done, he made more money. And his supervisor got a production bonus too.

So guess who bought the beer that night? Now **that’s** positive reinforcement.

Sad to say, without knowing it, the managers had created positive reinforcement for breaking safety rules. They were to blame for the injured worker.

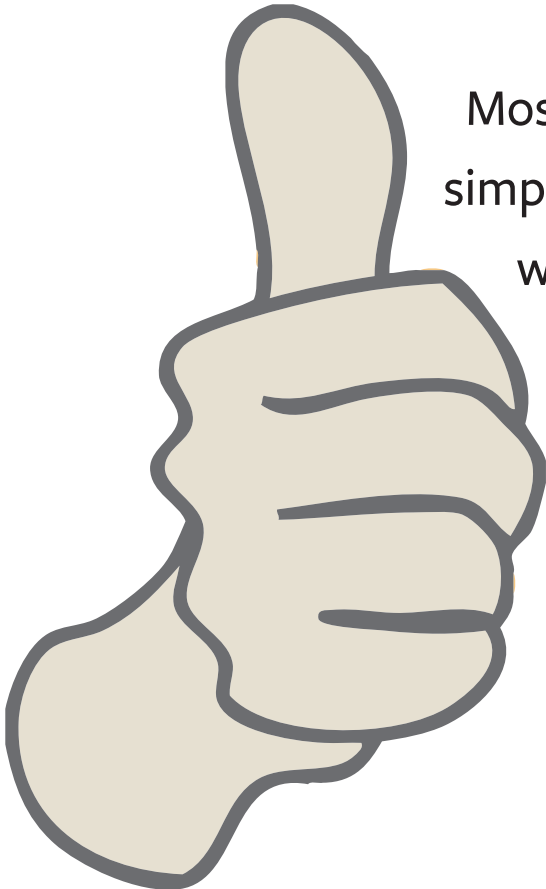
These unknown positive consequences continue to make people do things that are “crazy,” for example:

Some people diagnosed with lung cancer keep smoking . . . the positive and immediate consequences of the nicotine reinforce their “stupid” behavior.

Some people drive cars while reading e-mail on their computers.

Most people who are injured are in fact not stupid or crazy. They are simply reacting to the world they live in and performing their work in a way that will lead to a maximum amount of positive reinforcement with a belief that they have almost no chance of experiencing a negative reinforcer or accident. This is human nature.

The challenge for safety people, and in fact for all managers who need to achieve behavior change is to create more positive consequences for the desired safety behaviors and remove the positive consequences for the wrong behaviors.



But how do we do this? Is it another picnic? A Company party?
A gift card for everyone because the team met its goals?

If only it were that simple.

NOT ANOTHER PICNIC: ONE SIZE DOES NOT FIT ALL . . .

“We do great job at employee recognition,” said the Human Resource Manager of a large hospital.

“That’s good to know,” I said.

“How do you go about recognizing great performers?”

“Well, we do a quarterly picnic and select the Employee of the Quarter for each department. Then there’s our Christmas party where we choose an Employee of the Year,” she replied.

“How is that working for you?

Have you positively impacted your employee and patient satisfaction numbers?

Can you measure and quantify your employee engagement?

Did your system really change anybody’s behavior?”

She stared back at me in silence. I figured this meeting was over.

Oops, I think I did it again.

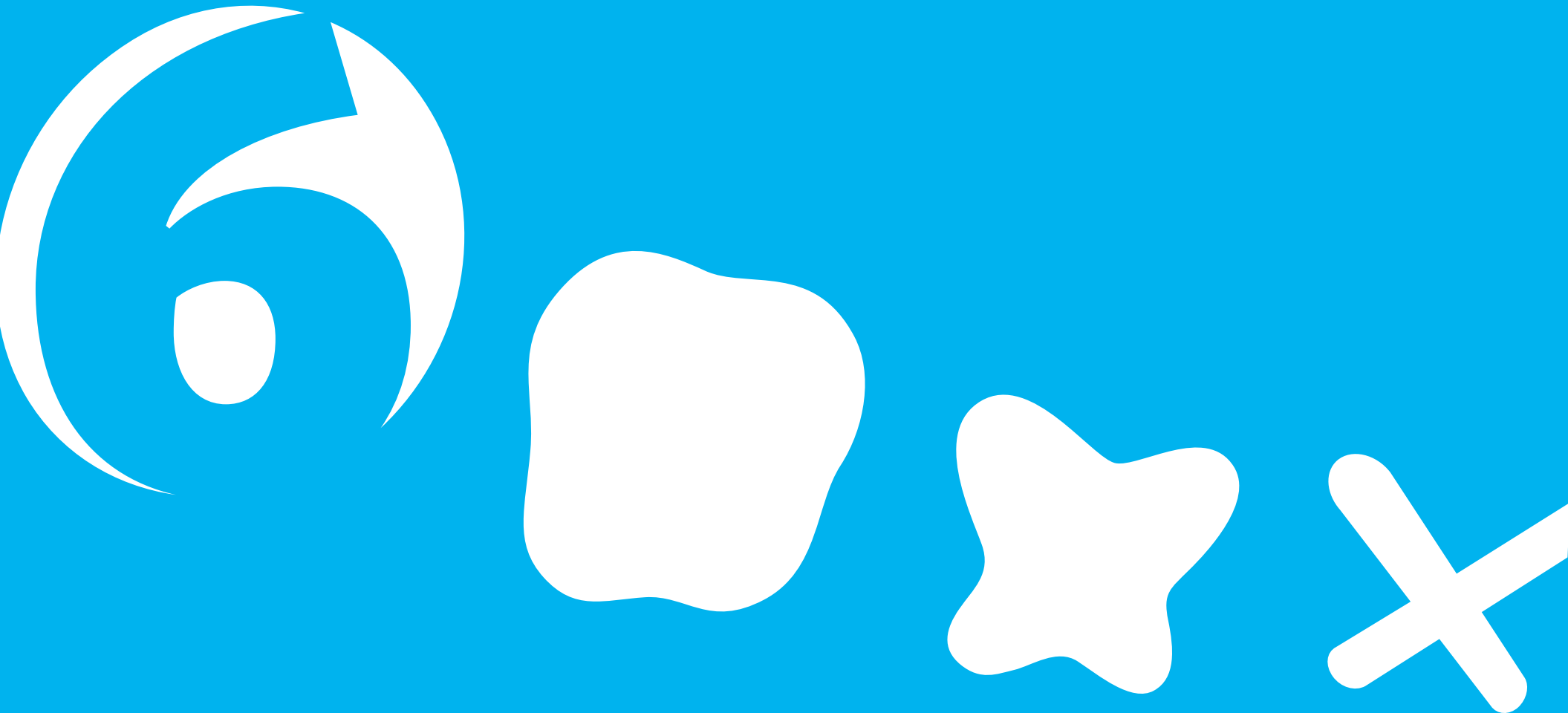
(You're not the only one Britney.)

I felt kind of bad for being too direct. It looked like my honesty had gotten me in trouble.

In my next column we'll explore one-size-fits-all recognition
and why it does more harm than good.

Stay tuned!

Not Another Picnic!



When it comes to Recognition, one size does NOT fit all . . .

From over the Persian Gulf en route to a client in the Middle East . . .

“We do great job at employee recognition,”
said the Human Resource Manager of a large hospital.

“That’s good to know,” I said.

“How do you go about recognizing
great performers?”

“Well, we do a quarterly picnic and select the Employee of the
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“How is that working for you?

Have you positively impacted your employee and patient satisfaction numbers?

Can you measure and quantify your employee engagement?

Did your system really change anybody’s behavior?”

She stared back at me in silence.

Apparently I had hit a nerve. I had a pretty good idea that this meeting was over.

Oops, I think I did it again. (You're not the only one Britney.) I felt kind of bad for being too direct. It looked like my honesty had gotten me in trouble.

In my last column I promised to talk about one-size-fits-all recognition and why it does more harm than good.

I think we're all familiar with Rose's story, which I tell in the Green Beans & Ice Cream workshop in Athens, Greece. In case you haven't heard the story, check it out at: www.greenbeansandicecream.com





In short, it goes like this:

Rose, who works for the top luxury hotel firm in the world, was helping me with a survey of their employees.

I asked her how many times she'd been positively reinforced for something done well during her three years of employment at the hotel.

Her eyes narrowed as she tried to remember.

“Only once . . . I was voted . . . Best Customer Service of the Spa.”

“Why?” I asked.

“**I don't know!**” she lamented.

“They never told me. Maybe it was a survey or something? But the worst part was how they surprised me in front of my peers and told them I was the best, and they weren't. Now, two of those ladies won't speak to me.

It was, the worst day of my life!” said Rose.

To fully understand the pain this caused both Rose and her co-workers,
consider this scenario:

I have two daughters: Carli and Daphne.
What if I pop in one day from a business trip, line them up,
and say, “Hey Carli, give Daphne a hand, ‘cause she’s
Daughter of the Month, and you’re not.”

How’s that going to go over?

Not well.

Anytime we set up one employee to win at the expense of
everyone else, we have given our workplace culture a suicide pill.
Competition is what we do in the marketplace, not what we do
with our co-workers. Our team rises and falls based on the
teams’ achievements.



43

Many managers have seen the folly of the “... of the Month” genre, and so they’ve swung the positive reinforcement (R+) pendulum 180 degrees to the opposite extreme:

ONE- SIZE-FITS-ALL R+

Too bad they pass that valuable option right in the middle called behavior-based recognition.

(By the way, R+ is just behavioral jargon for positive feedback, reinforcement, recognition, awards, and so on.

It’s R+ if it increases the behavior that precedes it, and if the employee likes it.)



So, our well-meaning managers have launched into a series of picnics, barbecues, T-shirt giveaways, and endless other celebrations to commemorate safety, sales, quality, and other milestones. In these systems, usually a lagging indicator (result) is rewarded, and in the case of safety those results may have been achieved with unsafe behaviors and the suppression of injury and incident reporting.

This Pandora's Box of bad habits is one reason that the behavioral community often argues against incentive systems.

“Hey, the one-size-fits-all method is at least better than Employee Of The Month!” says the hospital manager.

But is it really?

Not in my book.

Here's why:

As I've traveled the world speaking, I've used CAVE People to explain why one size does NOT fit all, because everywhere I've been, every manager has employees who are CAVE People.

What's a CAVE person?

My good friend Kenny Sawyer says they are ...

“**C**.itizens **A**.gainst **V**.irtually **E**.verything”



Do you have any CAVE people at your company?

I bet you do. They whine and complain. They sleep through training meetings. They break the safety rules and drag down your team. They insult your clients and bring your customer satisfaction scores down. Studies show **over 15 percent** of employees fall into this category. Some put that percentage even higher.

Thank goodness you also have people who are hard workers . . . those above-and-beyond people who value delivering a safe, quality product or customer experience.

The trouble is, as my friend Leo Inghilleri says,
less than 2 percent of the workforce are self-motivated, high performers.

And the only problem with these workers is that they think everyone else is as motivated as they are, or at least they should be.

All of this means that about **80 percent** of your employees fall in that no-man's land of being just average performers. They are the **“invisible men (and women)”** when it comes time to measure what they did to make a difference.

Now, given this cross section of the average workforce—

- ▶ The above-and-beyond workers,
- ▶ The CAVE people,
- ▶ And the invisible men (and women)—

What have we done in our infinite wisdom and intelligence for some 50 years?

We've used that tried and true ONE-SIZE-FITS-ALL method of recognition, like this:

“Err, excuse me folks . . . we would like to recognize your performance for this past quarter. Now, I know that 10 of you above-and-beyond workers have burned the midnight oil to help our company meet its goals, while 10 of you CAVE people have slept through every training meeting, broken every safety rule, and missed every deadline.

Lastly, let's not forget our 80 invisible men (and women) who show up here day after day and accomplish ZERO of the company's objectives.”

Now the manager holds a \$100 bill over his head and announces,

“So, in honor of your department's efforts, here's a \$100 bonus for everyone, and we're going to have a picnic this Saturday plus you get a free T-Shirt if you show up.”

Wait a second!

If you adopt this one-size-fits-all method, did you just positively or negatively reinforce your 10 best workers? (Hint: the answer starts with N.)

How bout the CAVE people? Did you give them positive reinforcement? Yep, you sure did.

You effectively said:

“Hey go out and break more safety rules, sleep through more training, and do what you’ve been doing some more. This money tells you it’s okay in our culture to do just that.”

And your 80 invisible men and women will at best remain invisible because
“It doesn’t do any good to work hard around here. Nobody will notice anyway.
Look at those poor above-and-beyond guys. They’re suckers.”

The folly of one-size-fits-all recognition seems clear.

Yet, it happens day-in, day-out, at millions of companies around the world in the form of picnics, profit sharing, gain sharing, goal sharing, and the like. These plans sound great in the CEO’s office, but they’re awful when we see them at work on the front lines.

●●●●●▶ Do these initiatives change behavior?

No.

●●●●●▶ Do they improve performance?

No.

(How can they? You're rewarding something that happened in your rearview mirror.)

So, my advice to anyone doing "...of the Month" or one-size-fits-all R+ is to just kill those programs. You're better off doing nothing.

Next, develop a system for reinforcing the right behaviors to drive the results you need.

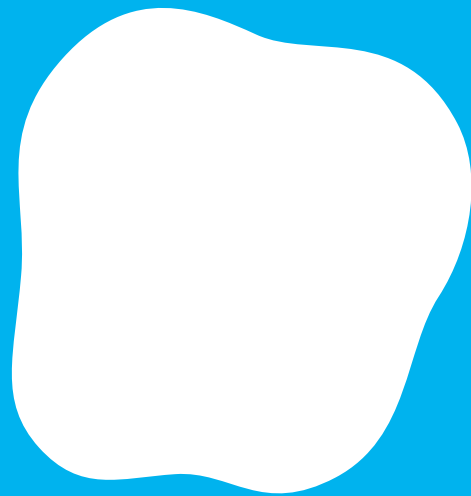
In my next article, I want to explore other sources of R+ that are often underutilized—namely peers, customers, and family.

I'd like you to meet my friend Ollie, a wonderful lady in Ireland, and hear about Mr. Beckett's "Fair, Shiny, Silver Plaque" and how it touches her heart to this day.

So, keep an eye out for my Summer Blog, "Mr. Beckett's Fair, Shiny, Silver Plaque" which I hope to have to you in the next couple of months. Gotta go now. Lots of sand dunes to cross.

Take care. —B

I'm Confused...



Recently I was greatly honored to be asked to do a keynote speech at the Behavioral Safety Now (BSN) conference (www.behavioralsafetynow.com).

“Who, me?” I asked.

Most of you know that the folks at BSN have pretty much set the gold standard in behavior based safety (BBS) thought leadership for some time. In fact, I learned when I got there, that I was the only non-PhD keynote speaker ever in 17 years!

So what could a guy like me bring to the party that hasn't been discussed already?

Now, my usual morning routine is to push a 100-pound dumbbell up into the air while listening to Bon Jovi at a level which usually gets my wife pretty mad, although my dog Elvis seems to like it.



Lately, my wife's been pretty happy, since I've decided to forego my favorite music in favor of listening to my collection of past presentations from the American Society of Safety Engineers (ASSE), the National Safety Council (NSC), BSN, and the like.

It's taken a lot of self discipline to go from working out with Bon Jovi to pumpin' iron with BBS consultants, but I am glad I've done it.

And, having sifted through the absolute BEST and WORST speakers of these conferences, I have become ...

Confused.

Here's why:

I heard a BBS consultant do a presentation on the role of steering committees in BBS.

I was eager to learn more!

The gentleman started with a few introductory comments saying,

“I have absolutely no research to back up what I'm about to say; it's my opinion.”

(Immediately, red warning lights flashed through my brain!

I almost dropped the 100-pound dumbbell on my head but caught it in the nick of time.)

So, ok, I'm about to hear some consultant give me an opinion ***without any research to back it up. This should be fun, I thought.***

The consultant went on to offer his advice:

1 “I tell all my Steering Committees you should meet weekly to decide who to positively reinforce or ‘R+’ in behaviorist lingo.”

Good, weekly is sure better than monthly recognition, I thought.

2 “You should go out and find a person who has done an observation and recognize them in front of their peers.”

Huh? I thought that public recognition can backfire, since some people are afraid that their peers will perceive them as the teacher's pet. From what I've read, you never publicly praise a person in front of others without asking that person's permission in advance.

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“You should know your employees, and know what’s really reinforcing to them. So, you need to learn as a manager what each person likes and find something you can say that links to that. For example, if they like bonsai trees, you should find an article about bonsai trees and give it to them and tell them you thought they’d like it.”

Now, maybe you know a lot of guys who like to grow bonsai trees, but I don’t. And if I ever do take up bonsai growing, I’d probably like a bonsai tree more than an article about one. Plus, while it’s important to know what people like and are interested in, it’s also important to let them choose what’s positively reinforcing to them.



“You should celebrate improvements in the process monthly, but never do the same kind of celebration twice in the same year . . . and oh yes, never, ever give people tangible award gifts. Mix up your celebrations; do pizza this month and watermelon the next. That’s the key.”

*Hey, last time I checked, pizza and watermelon **ARE TANGIBLE** . . . unless someone has invented anti-matter pizza. While there is a place for company picnics and they have some value, one safety director lamented the fact that “We feed them for being safe and the next minute we tell them to lose some weight in our new wellness program.”*



“Celebrations should be linked to contingencies. Don’t throw a ‘safety party,’ but be specific about what your team did, and why we’re celebrating.”

Now I like this one!

The whole idea of pinpointing a behavior or result and then celebrating as a team how we improved performance is a powerful concept.



“It’s wrong to focus on gifts and awards; you lose the personal touch. You shouldn’t give the same gifts to people, but if you do, make sure they have a logo on them.”

Ahh, earth to consultant, the latest research of Fortune 100 managers puts logo gifts as the least effective motivator of all. Bill Sims research shows that over 90 percent of us have received a logo gift we didn’t want, need, or use.

Conclusion: most logo gifts become throwaway items in a landfill.

7

“500 coffee mugs isn't R+ for anyone.”

I totally agree, but you have contradicted your earlier statement, where you suggest that giving everyone watermelon or pizza is a positive reinforcer. If we can't make 500 people happy with a coffee mug then logic says we can't do it with 500 pieces of pizza.

Plus, I just started my new Dr. Atkins high-protein diet!

8

“Make the recognition cost as little as you can.

When you budget for recognition, less is better.”

Hold on here a minute! If you do that, will you be giving people a pepperoni pizza minus the pepperoni and cheese? Now, that is positively punishing in my book. Instead I say walk softly and carry a big P.I.C.—no pun intended Aubrey—National research shows \$100 to \$200 per employee for the year is the norm for recognition and the numbers are climbing steadily.

56



“Assume everyone will be at 100 percent participation.”

This is a classic beginner’s mistake. In this scenario, the beginner takes his or her tiny \$25 budget and assumes a worst case scenario that all employees will participate, and so they make the reinforcer an “itsy bitsy, teeny weeny” whatever. In fact, it’s hard to get 100 percent of people to do anything. Studies show that 40 percent of all employees do not cash in their Wal-Mart, Visa, and American Express gift cards. So, by planning that 100 percent of the people will participate, you actually shoot yourself in the foot. Instead, make the R+ bigger and you’ll get more people to engage.



“You should reserve 10 percent of your budget for individual recognition and 90 percent for monthly group celebrations.”

*This one flies in the face of all logic and reason. First of all, we know that the most powerful R+ is that which is linked to the behavior within 15 seconds. That means we need to reinforce **INDIVIDUALS** and **NOT GROUPS**. Group reinforcement, while creating powerful peer pressure, may be positive, but it certainly is **NOT IMMEDIATE** and, by George, it is **UNCERTAIN**. In Aubrey’s book, and in mine, PIC blows the doors off PIU’s hands down.*

Maybe you are as confused now as I was. There sure seems to be a lot of confusion on the part of companies who have implemented BBS over the last 15 years.

Some of it is absolutely hilarious.

For example, a company was interviewing BBS consultants in their selection process.

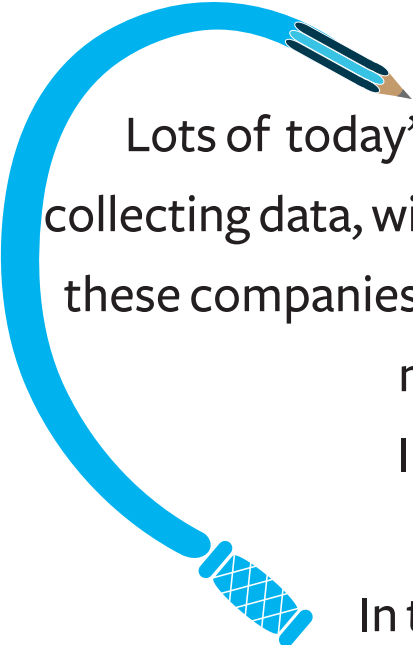
One PhD was asked, “How many failures have you had?”

“ We don’t know. We don’t follow up with our clients after we train them in our process. ”

To prepare for my BSN keynote I conducted a survey of companies to see how their BBS processes are going. You can get a copy of that survey along with a link to one of my presentations free of charge by going to this link: www.billsims.com/bsnbreakout.htm

In a future blog, I’ll give you my analysis of the BBS survey data.

But the bottom line is this:

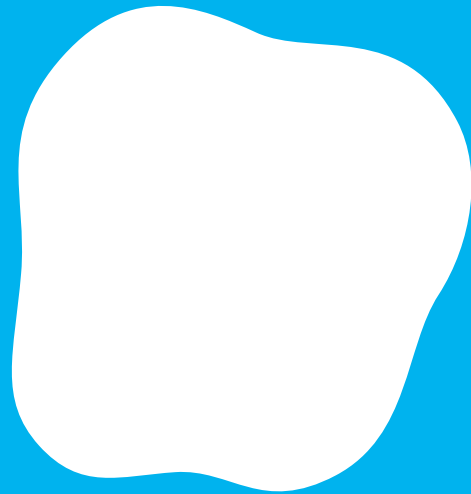


Lots of today's mature BBS processes are STUCK. People go through the motions, collecting data, with the pencil whipping and negative or non-existent R+. We need to help these companies build a culture, as my good friend Bob Veazie says. We've done that for many companies, helping them fix broken BBS systems. In my next blog, I'll share more thoughts on how to do it.

In the meantime, if you're doing your workout, I suggest you join me and Elvis as we listen to Bon Jovi. At least you won't be ...

Confused.

Battery Cables



It was about 2:30 p.m. and I had just finished a speaking assignment for the Tarheel Safety Chapter in Charlotte, North Carolina. They are a lively group of safety professionals who asked me to come and speak about behavior change, which I did. While there I learned a lot about some changes coming down the pipeline from OSHA, from my new BFF, Bob, with OSHA (more on that later).

After the meeting, I packed up my computer and projector and put them in the trunk of my car, sliding into the front seat. As I've done a million times before, I put the key in the switch and turned it to the right, convinced in my mind that I was about to hear that good old V8 rumble to life, one of my top ten favorite PICs in life.
(Thanks again, Aubrey, for that helpful acronym!)

However, while I had the A and B parts down perfectly for this task (antecedent and behavior) good old Mr. C (consequence) showed up in a totally unexpected form:
NOTHING HAPPENED.

A + **B** = **C**
ANTECEDENT + BEHAVIOR = CONSEQUENCE

“Dang!” I said. “Dead battery.”

Even a shade tree mechanic like me can figure that one out. Next, I did a root cause analysis in my brain to determine why and how this had happened.

Oh yeah, I remember now, I spent an hour in my car before giving my speech and plugged my notebook into my cigarette lighter to juice it up so I could finish a live Webinar that I had promised to do with another company from the parking lot outside the Tarheel meeting.



Technology is so cool. I had my own little WiFi bubble right there in the parking lot. I was feeling like the incredible techno-guy.

Who'd have thought my notebook could suck that much juice out of a car battery that fast?

Guess what?

It can.

It did.

I morphed quickly from incredible techno-guy to a pathetic “girlie man.”

My first call was to the roadside assistance number to see how fast they could get someone to jump-start my car. Then a little voice in my head said,

“Bill, remember you put some battery cables in the trunk for emergencies like this one.”

BAM! Hey there they are, in that orange case. Now, all I need is a kind, helpful person with a good battery to help me boost my engine!

I looked two spaces over and saw a guy pulling out of his parking space and two ladies chatting by their car as well. By the looks of things, he was a repairman just finishing his lunch break. I summoned up my courage and walked over to him. I had to act now, or never.



“Scuse me sir,” I said, “but I’ve got a dead battery . . . would you mind giving me a boost? I have my cables ready . . .”
(I showed him the orange cables.) The look on his face went from apprehension to a half smile and he rolled down his window and we shook hands.

Then this kind knight pulled his truck up to my car and we connected up the cables, using the appropriate safety technique I had learned at the ripe old age of 17 from Mr. Jones, a teacher who had also described to me what it was like to have a car battery explode on you.

That mental image stuck with me— a very good antecedent.

In short order, my V8 sprang back to life, its deep throaty growl as good as ever! Not bad for a ride that has been running against the wind for over 94,368 miles. (Hey, come to think of it, I’ve been doing the same thing!) As Han Solo told Luke, “It ain’t the years kid, it’s the miles.”

I felt very grateful to the Repair Guy. I wanted to **DO SOMETHING**, to give something back to him.

And that’s where I went wrong.

I shook the man's hand and gave him \$5 cash. It was my last \$5, and it was all I could think of at the time, and I was so grateful to him, that I figured it was better than nothing.

The smile that had appeared on his face after helping me became ever so slightly muted, an imperceptible change that no one saw but me.

“No, no, I don't need any money,” he said.

I realized immediately that I'd make a mistake in offering him the money. I hadn't thought through the impact of this “reinforcer” on this particular individual.

But this whole sequence (just like so many fleeting interactions we have with others), went down in under 38 seconds, so maybe it was easy to make a mistake. I had made one nonetheless.

I was in trouble, but I didn't want to totally blow this moment.



And then I remembered my dad and “The Power of the Pen.”

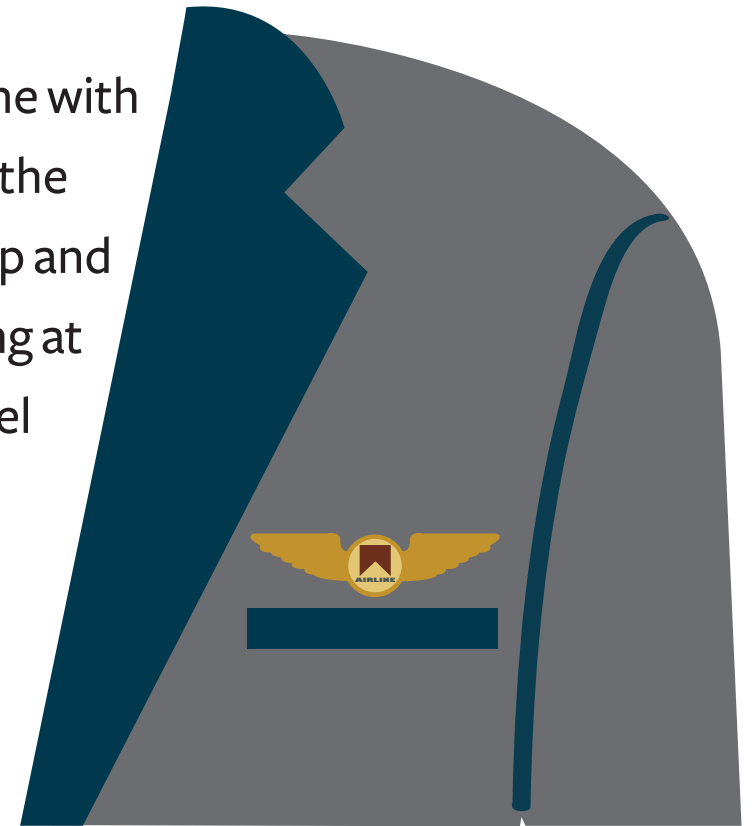
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As a little guy, my dad would sometimes surprise me and take me out of elementary school to go with him to see clients. These were fun trips where I learned many things about sales methods and techniques. I watched my dad in awe as he spoke with CEO’S and business leaders, helping them develop recognition solutions.

For a second, I flashed back to being on the old Delta plane with my dad on one of those trips. I recalled with fondness the stewardesses and pilots who “back in the day” dressed up and looked so professional. I could see the stewardess smiling at me and handing me my own plastic captain’s wings lapel badge which I proudly pinned to my suit jacket.

(Weren’t the 70s cool?)

I remembered my dad smiling back at her and thanking her for showing kindness to his son. Then my dad reached into his bag and pulled out a Parker Pen in a nice gift box, inscribed with the words, “Thanks for making a difference.”



66

He told the stewardess how much he appreciated her kindness to me and that this gift was for her, because she had made a difference to him. She beamed and took the pen to show all the other flight attendants. She even moved me and dad up to first class!

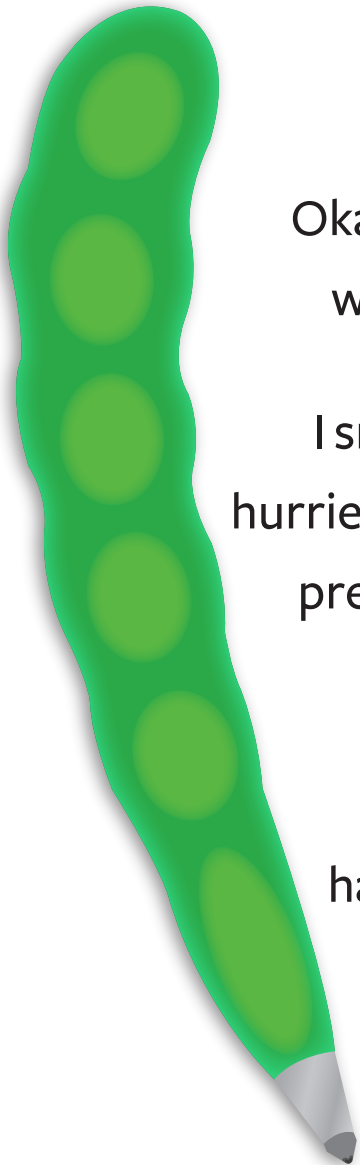
Wow! I decided right then and there that I had to figure out what was behind Dad and the Power of the Pen.

Okay. The memory came and went in a split second, and there was this guy, with that smile slowly fading away after my goof with the five dollar bill.

I smiled back again at him and said, “Hey, wait a second.” And then began hurriedly digging through my bag to see if I had any Green Bean pens left from my presentation. (Many of you know that I love green beans and give away pens shaped like that very vegetable at my sessions.)

There it was. One last green bean pen was left in the bottom of my bag. I handed it to the man and again thanked him for his kindness, seeing his smile brighten back up, and he even asked me what kind of work I do (so I explained that we are behavior change consultants).

We parted as friends and I had a good feeling in my heart.



I called the Roadside Assistance guy to tell him there was no need to come.



As I drove down I-77 south of Charlotte I began to analyze what had just happened, and as near as I can figure it, here it is:

- ▶ I asked the repair guy to help me, which he did.
- ▶ I felt obligated from my heart to thank him and to accompany it with a gift of some sort.
- ▶ In the two seconds I took to choose a gift, I chose the only one I had at the time, which was money.
- ▶ He rejected it and was a bit offended that I offered it.
- ▶ He warmly accepted the small green bean pen, which was novel, different, and a souvenir of that moment.
- ▶ When I presented both the cash award and the pen, I expressed heartfelt appreciation. But he didn't want the cash, while he was cool with the pen.

Hmmm . . . what do we learn here? A lot, I think.

Here are a few takeaways.

1

On the surface, it would appear that the man simply preferred a little plastic pen to \$5. The easy conclusion would be that logo gifts are a better award than cash.

Many consultants, managers, and committee members make this mistake day-in and day-out. They purchase more and more logo stuff as handout items for employees: these may include caps, key chains, and mugs with a logo doled out to employees in honor of all sorts of achievements. Many companies have a whole warehouse full of these items.

While logo gifts can occasionally have real impact on our behavior (remember dad and the Power of the Pen?), research by the Incentive Federation shows that logo'd items are the **LEAST EFFECTIVE** reward/behavior change tool we know of (see my last blog “I’m Confused . . .” for more on that).

The most effective reinforcers from our research and that of others are social reinforcers (my smile, handshake, and thanking the man) and according to the Federation study, giving a person a gift such as an iPod or other type award that they truly want and need are also effective. Cash and gift cards are also judged more effective than logo gifts as reinforcers.

Several speakers at BSN passionately argue for the use of logo'd or symbolic gifts. One prominent behavioral consultant told me, "If a person doesn't want a baseball cap, it's because he doesn't want that logo. You need to put a different logo on it and he will want it."

Huh?

What if he already has 18 ball caps in his closet and just doesn't need another one?

While logo gifts have their place, sadly, it is impossible to choose a logo gift that everyone will find reinforcing and/or useful.

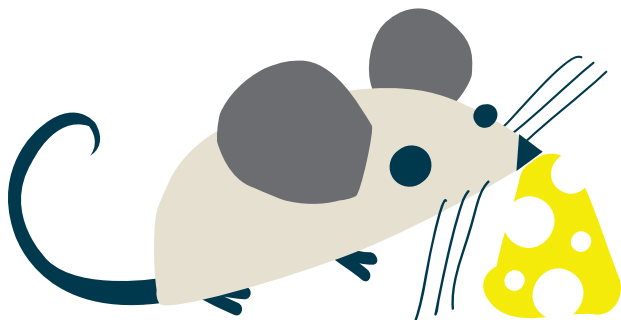


Why did the repair guy refuse my \$5 but accept the pen?

Our behavior is continually being reinforced by consequences that are either external (extrinsic) and/or internal (intrinsic or self-reinforcing).

There is a lot of controversy in the world of psychology between the cognitive psychologists and the behaviorists. Some have even tried to fuse the two schools of thought together which is a noble task, but for many people, this effort can make the water even muddier, as you try to mesh two very complex models. (See my blog “The Great Motivational Debate” for more on this.)

In a nutshell, the cognitive guys believe intrinsic or “self-motivation” is the more powerful human motivator, while behaviorists focus on delivering extrinsic or external reinforcers (social and tangible) to increase behavior and drive performance.



VERSES



Curiously enough, BF Skinner, the behaviorist legend, once said,

“ Human thoughts are simply behaviors we haven’t learned to measure yet. ”

I kind of like that idea.

In my BSN keynote speech in Jacksonville, I offered the audience a challenge.

Which type of reinforcer is most effective: internal or external?

And I believe that the answer is (drum roll please) ...

Both.

I believe that the repair guy at the moment he helped me was being reinforced from his “heart” or self-reinforced for his good deed. He cared about my plight and was feeling the power of the statement, “It is better to give than to receive.” In this mode of behavior, we humans are at our best. We are the firefighter rushing into the Twin Towers on 9/11. Or the soldier who covers the grenade with his body to save his comrades. A wise man once said,

“ Greater love has no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends. ”

So when my repair guy was operating in this mode of high self-reinforcement, my giving him \$5 made him feel cheap, as if he was a hired servant. Thus, it was a punisher, not a positive reinforcer. It offended him and reduced our relationship to a mere transaction, something external.

The pen however, was a gift, a symbol of our brief friendship. The pen was well accepted, and didn't conflict with his own internal reinforcement, but likely will be used a long time and as a reminder of my appreciation for his help.

But the game changes somewhat when people come to work for us and we pay them a salary for what they do.

Had the roadside assistance guy showed up before my repair guy, if he had jumped-off my car, and I tipped him \$5, he would have been cool with it.

Why?

Because it was a little extra compensation for services rendered. The pen might have offended him, but I doubt the cash would have. Had I given nothing to the roadside assistance guy (no pen, no money) he would have probably muttered "Cheap jerk" under his breath. Verbal praise here would have fallen on the roadside assistance man's deaf ears, because it would have seemed insincere and cheap.

Social reinforcers work well if and only if they are sincere, specific, and not seen as manipulative. That's why training in giving feedback and verbal reinforcement is very important.

But in the relationship between employer/employee, sadly, many companies are making the same \$5 mistake that I made with my repair guy.

Busy managers don't have time to find out what gift would be truly reinforcing for each one of their people. In the 80s, a supervisor had 10 people reporting to him; in today's downsized world, he might easily have to oversee 100.

How is that poor supervisor or steering committee going to know what reinforcers work for their people?

Answer: They don't and they can't. Even though that would be great, realistically there isn't enough time to know.

So what do most companies do? They succumb to the power of the Dark Side, the easy way out. They give people money or cash substitutes like gift cards. Granted, rewarding your people with gift cards and money has advantages:




- ▶ It's easy.
- ▶ People can choose more things to get with their gift card/money.
- ▶ The CAVE (Citizens Against Virtually Everything) people stop whining—sometimes.

But rewarding with gift cards and money has these important disadvantages:

- ▶ Sometimes, it conflicts with the internal motivation or self-reinforcement that we want people to develop (as it with did my repair guy).
- ▶ People become “entitled” to the cash; they expect it and their behavior is driven totally by the money and not self-reinforcement.
- ▶ You lose well over 50 percent of your cash/gift card budget to income taxes and other hidden costs of gift cards.
- ▶ Dozens of studies show that non-cash reinforcer gifts have 3 to 6 times the impact of cash on behavior.

I have seen many companies fall into the trap of confusing compensation with recognition. They ultimately fail to get people to a higher level of behavior since they rely solely on carrot-and-stick approaches.

So what is the right rock to use to hit the mark with employees and ensure that we're delivering positive reinforcement?

-  Reinforcement and recognition must be linked to the behavior within seconds, not days or weeks.
-  Recognition should be specific and include both tangible and social reinforcement techniques. Don't succumb to the Dark Side and reduce everything to a transaction due to lack of time or tools.
-  When it comes to the gift, make it a gift and make it fun, not an obligatory transaction. Make the act of giving the gift memorable. Provide each person a wide array of options to choose from so they can find something personally reinforcing to them. Use cash and cash substitutes as a last resort, or filter the choices so people won't just pay off their bills or buy a tank of gas with their award.

4

Make the award unexpected and a surprise! Again, make it fun.

5

Track everything down to each behavior reinforced when, why, and by whom.

6

Analyze, analyze, analyze your data to move the process to the next level.

Our new Genesis platform has been developed with these fundamentals in mind, and it provides busy managers with comprehensive tools to pinpoint and reinforce critical behaviors and results that drive bottom-line business improvements.

The proof in the pudding is a recent report from Horizon, our newest client, who have reported injury reductions of over 60 percent in a few months of operation of using both Smartcard and Genesis.

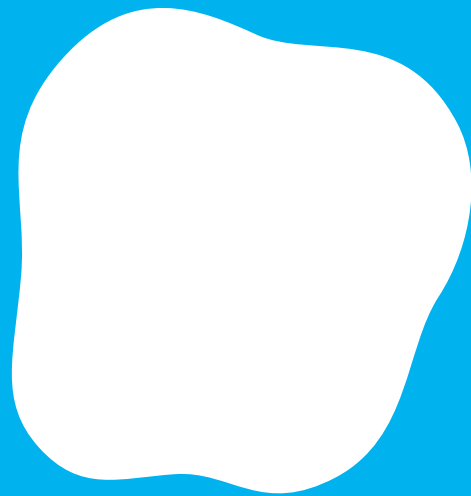
Well, that about wraps up this blog.

Oh wait, I forgot to tell you about Bob, my BFF with OSHA. Bob says that OSHA has a SEP (code name for Special Emphasis Program) which means they are looking hard at incentive systems that reward lagging indicators and which drive injury hiding.

So, if you are using a system that rewards people for working days, weeks, months without reporting injuries, ***now would be a good time to rethink your strategy.***

A graphic with a blue header containing the word "MARCH" in white, bold, sans-serif font. Below the header is a grid with 7 columns labeled "SUN", "MON", "TUE", "WED", "THU", "FRI", and "SAT". The grid has 5 rows of empty cells below the headers.A graphic with a blue header containing the word "MARCH" in white, bold, sans-serif font. Below the header is a grid with 7 columns labeled "SUN", "MON", "TUE", "WED", "THU", "FRI", and "SAT". The grid has 6 rows of empty cells below the headers.

Deer in the Headlights: Part 1





My long journey started at 6am, driving past the deer in my neighborhood munching the grass with it's early morning dew on it. I was headed for a long trip to the Middle East (with a stop to see clients in Atlanta before the jump).

As usual, there was no food on the regional planes, and by nightfall I'd had almost nothing to eat. I was getting hungry ...

“Chicken or Beef?” asked the stewardess, as the plane slid through the midnight air towards Dubai.

With a guilty smile I asked, “Can I have both?”

She smiled back and said, “Perfect.”

You see, normally I go coach to prove I'm still tough when I make those 26 hour global flights, but this time I splurged and cashed in some of my frequent flyer miles (shhh! don't tell Margie!) and made my way into the Delta Business Class Elite, on my way to Kuwait, and other parts of the Middle East.

I had heard I'd be treated well, and Delta even promised I would have a lie-flat bed in exchange for all those miles I gave back to them; I had saved them for probably 20 years or more.

My back jumped for joy at the thought of actually sleeping on a plane. I thought what a great use of my Delta Skymiles it would be!



81

Hey, if I was paying for it, why not have chicken AND beef? I mean, it sure beat the beer and peanuts I was used to. Getting two dinners at once was a pretty big PIC for me (thanks again Aubrey!), and as I sipped my cold beer (and still nibbled on peanuts) I started to tune into the guys around me.

Here we were, kind of like space travelers in some sci-fi movie, in our little cocoons, talking, traveling, about to go into suspended animation until we reached Andromeda or Dubai or somewhere.

The guy in Cocoon 1 in front of me was in high speed data systems, working for a government contractor. The guy in Cocoon 4 to the left of me was in communications . . . working for a government contractor.

“So where are you guys going and what are you doing there?” I asked.

“Iraq. Data system work. That’s about all I can say!” said the Dude in Cocoon 1.

“Afghanistan. Comm link systems. Beyond that, it’s classified.” Said the Dude in Cocoon 4.

“Hey man I’m cool with that . . .”

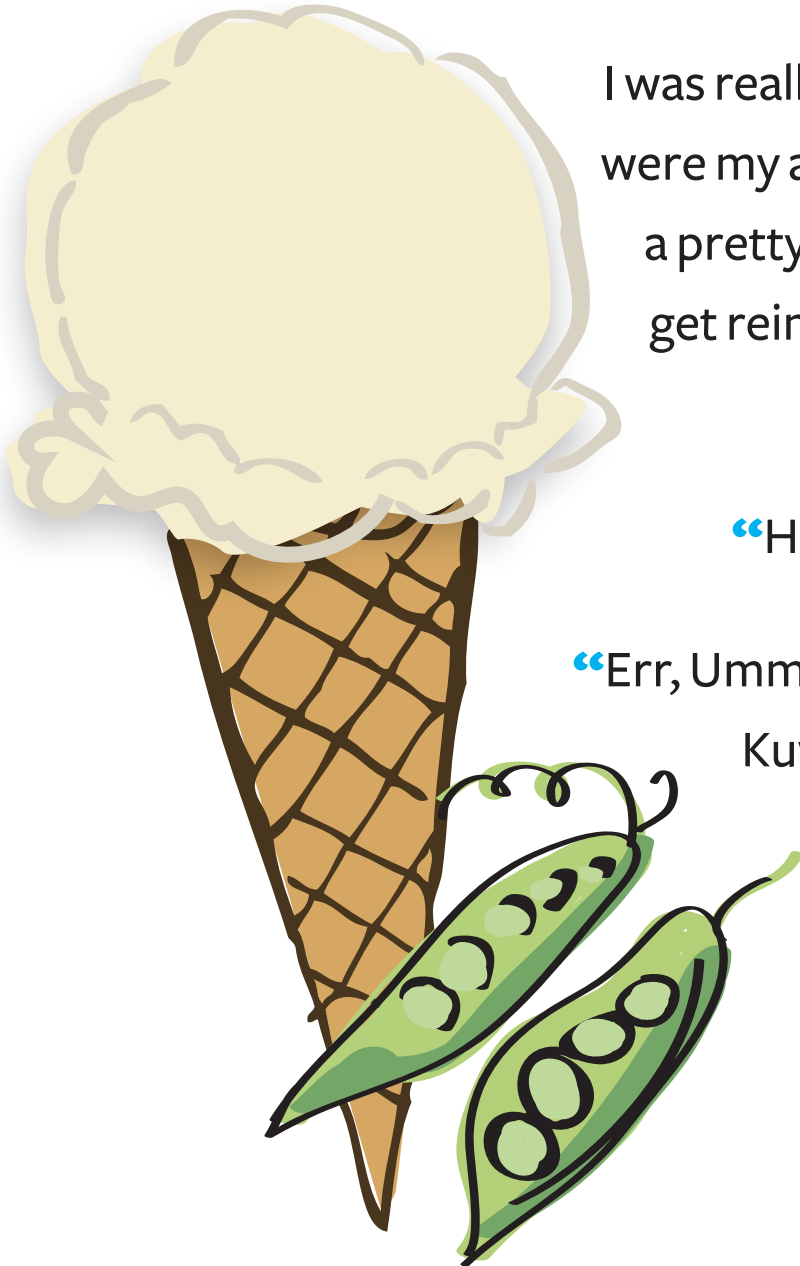
I was wondering when I could get more peanuts.

I was really impressed to be with some heavy hitting guys who were my age and traveling to do some pretty neat techie stuff in a pretty exciting place. They were chatting about how they'd get reimbursed for their \$10,000 tickets by their companies and then they stopped ...

“How about you Bill, what do you do?” they asked.

“Err, Umm, well, you see, I've been asked to speak in Bahrain and Kuwait about my upcoming book ... *Green Beans & Ice Cream: The Recipe for Behavior Change*.” I responded somewhat nervously, a bit unsure as to their reaction.

They got quiet for a minute ...



83 I figured it was time to break out the Power of the Pen and handed them all a green bean pen.

Then I told them the story of Green Beans & Ice Cream and they broke into big smiles ... and asked if I could spare a few extra Green bean pens for their kids, which I gladly did ... I hope those pens made it home with their daddies to their loved ones ...

... man am I tired ... I'm in Dubai ... and it's everything they say. Vegas on steroids. Wow.



I spent 4 hours with my cell service tech support before leaving the USA and,
“Yes Mr. Sims your cell phone will work just fine out of the country.”

And so now it’s time to call my family and tell them I’m safe and sound on the other side of
the pond.

One problem. The phone says SOS. Out of Service. Dead.

Bummer.

Maybe I’ll fix it at my next flight’s gate. Off I go . . .

So I get off my flight at gate 118, and learn that I’m late for
my connecting flight to Kuwait, which leaves from gate 323.

I haul my 2 rolling bags behind me and start looking for
gate 323. Yep, they have 500 gates or more in Dubai’s
Airport. It’s huge.

Hartsfield airport should be jealous . . .



After about 21 gates I ask someone,
“Where’s the train?”

“That will be in phase 3 sir . . . until
then, no train. You have to walk, sir.”

(Now I know why they are skinny here.)

Off I go.

By gate 318 I’m really tired. Walking 2 miles on hard leather dress shoes is tough. But my aching feet had no clue what was coming next. As I huffed and puffed to the gate the agent said, “Sorry sir, the gate has changed to gate 119.”

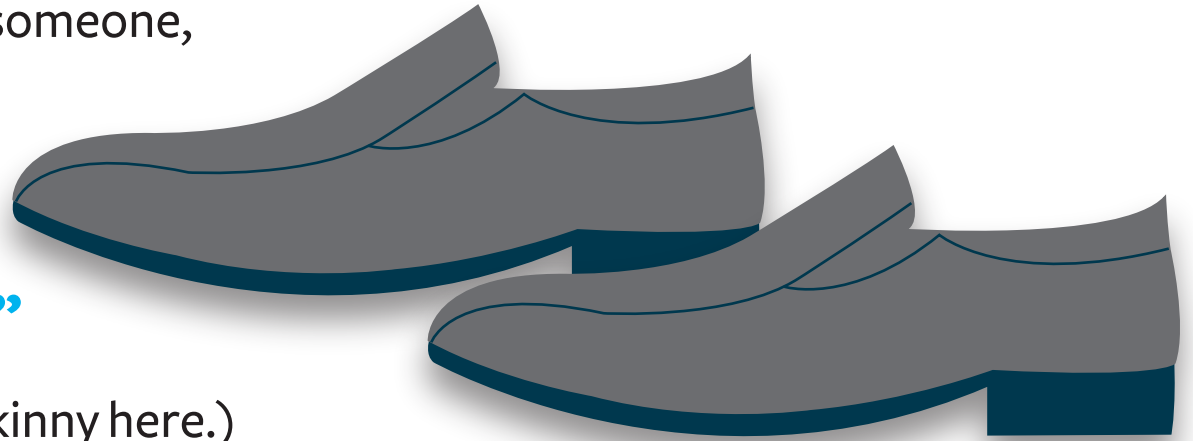
This was clearly not my day. 2 miles back. Sorry feet. After 23 hours of flight. Well, I hear walking breaks up the blood clots your legs get on the plane so maybe this is a good thing?

Look on the bright side, feet, ok?

I go back thru the maze of duty free shops and feel like I’m in Groundhog Day.

More of the same.

Now I’m at my gate.



30 minutes to departure. Checked in. Everything is cool.

So I whip out my Bluetooth headset and pair it to my notebook and find free Wi-Fi in the airport, and use Skype to call home. ET phone home!

I call the secret, special cell service IT number that a buddy gave me which goes deep into their Command Center and I find a really great tech support person and beg them to help me get my phone working.

They do. It works. Cool.

Why didn't I call you guys the first time, I wonder?

Now I'm in Kuwait and my good friend Brian meets me. We head out to his Toyota and the cold, wet winter I left at home is replaced by hot, sultry desert air. Off we head to the Kuwait Hilton on the Arab Gulf (nice place). I really appreciate him getting me to my hotel and oh
YES THEY HAVE STARBUCKS HERE!



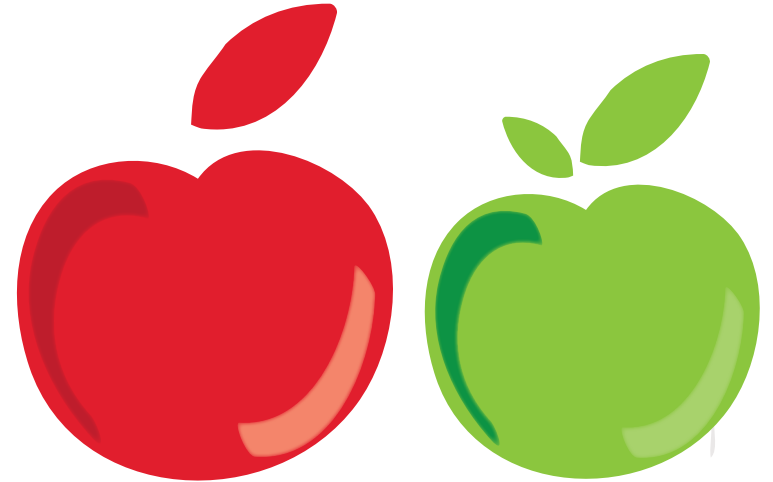
I have four hours to sleep and then I'm up and ready for meetings with companies and many people. But first, there is breakfast. So I'm eating my oatmeal and the waiter asks if I want juice.

“Yes please, apple,” I say.

“Red or Green, sir?”

Huh? I never had to pick the color of apple juice in my entire life.

Usually it was just Mott's, that clear, translucent stuff that we get in the plastic bottle.



“Sir?”

The silence was unbearable. I felt really stupid. In Kuwait, and can't even order apple juice. And in a moment of sheer genius I remember my chicken/beef solution . . .

“How about both?” said I, with a slight smile to the waiter.

“Certainly sir.” And he vanished.

A few seconds later I heard the grrrr and hum of a juicer machine. And then my smiling waiter dropped down freshly juiced apple juice. One glass of red apple juice. One of green.

That was neat. I gave my waiter a Green Bean pen and moved on.

Lots of meetings and lots of people and lots of presentations on Behavior Change.

I had fun. I think they did too.

The next day, my three new friends Srikanth, Ashok and Mohammed take me to tour Kuwait City. They are from India, and they take me for Indian food. I let them order for me, since I was clueless. Man was that good . . . sure beat the food on the plane!

Then we pull up to one of their observation towers . . . really, really big towers, with the restaurant/elevator/souvenir package. Neat place. Big black hummer with Kuwaiti SWAT teams doing a training exercise which had them rappelling down the tower and climbing up it. Pretty cool. Inside, pictures show me where Saddam Hussein tried to destroy the tower to break the will of the people, but I guess the tower won, as did the people . . .

“That will be \$472 sir,” said the airport check in guy.

“Huh? What’s that for?” I asked.

“Your bags sir, they are over the weight limit,
so we need \$472, cash,” he replied.



Since they didn’t take credit cards I had to scrape together the money from my wallet to pay for the bags I was taking

on to Bahrain. Not a good thing. Now I was down to \$20 cash. And I had a week to go in the Middle East . . . credit cards are good at most places, but you never know . . .

Now I’m at the Gulf Hotel in Bahrain (<http://www.gulfhotehbahrain.com/>), a neat hotel that dates back to 1929.

That’s where the meeting is. I meet my dear friend and coach Jitu and give him a hug. Then I collapse on the bed. I’ve been averaging 4 hours of sleep a night and tomorrow I begin teaching a course on *Green Beans & Ice Cream: The Recipe for Behavior Change*.

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I'm up early the next morning . . . body still seriously jetlagged, and so I read my 178 emails from America & the rest of the world. By 6 am I'm showered and shaved and ready for breakfast. As Jitu and I meet briefly he tells me that he had to work through the night without any sleep to help the conference go off smoothly. Man Jitu, I wish I had your energy! Jitu is the real Energizer Bunny. He just keeps going and going and going . . .

As my class begins to fill up I am busy hooking up my computer, projector, speakers etc., and cramming to get everything done by the 8 am start time. Then someone taps me on my shoulder and I look up, and there is Faiz, my dear friend who is like a brother to me!

On my first visit to the Middle East, a few years ago, Faiz was the first person I met . He took care of me like I was a little Cocker Spaniel puppy. Bought my dinner. Bought gifts for my family (just like my other friend Abdullah). I was so touched at their kindness and generosity. Plus, Faiz took me to the coolest restaurant ever, Bubbles by the Red Sea (yep, the one that Moses parted). Now, food is the fastest way to my heart, and Faiz must have figured this out cause once I had a good meal in me, I was in love with the Middle East . . . and still want to go back to Bubbles.



Where was I? Oh yes, so here is my good friend Faiz in my class and instantly I feel right at home . . . I crank up and start doing *Green Beans & Ice Cream* and the class is engaged, and involved. I have people from Britain, US, India, Saudi, Kuwait and more.
It's a tiny little melting pot . . .

Now, some places in the Middle East are a “dry county” but Bahrain is not one of those. So I head to Sherlock’s Pub in the bottom of the hotel, and who do I meet but my good friend Dr. Bill Pomfret. I’ve known Bill for over 20 years and he is a fantastic guy who learned from the likes of Dan Peterson and many of the great safety gurus. I buy Bill a cold beer and we reminisce about old times. He tells me a story of how he used positive reinforcement with an employee from India and how it made national headlines.

Hey Bill, how bout write that story up and share it with us ok? My fingers are tired of typing and you’ll tell the story better than I could!

By the second day of my course I'm learning something. I have WAY TOO MUCH STUFF to cover in 2 days. The folks in my class are asking questions, posing riddles, and arguing with me. Yep, that's right, in this culture, they like to argue with the teacher.

Well, it's a good thing that my mother was one of 14 kids. Her family were masters of argument. In fact, the Rains family is somewhat legendary for being on the wrong side of the law during Prohibition in the South and the Depression. My mom's dad used to say he could win one side of the argument with you and then take your side and win that one, too! Believe me, Pappy could do just that . . .

My Rains genes must have kicked in with three of my students, Ahmed, Abdullah and Mo. These three guys were really clever and firmly believed that people ought to be safe because,

“ It was good for them, because it was the right thing to do. ”

I also admire them because they were so engaged and passionate in the class.

They argued passionately that managers should not have to reinforce good behavior—the worker should do it because it is the best thing for them.

These guys were smoking serious cognitive wacky weed theory. Kind of like that stuff that Alfie Kohn and Daniel Pink put out.

I needed some Skinner shock therapy . . . and I needed it fast.

I could hear Pappy’s voice in my head saying “Use the force son . . .”



I decided to come out swinging.

“Ok, guys, I’ll agree with you that in a perfect world every worker should be entirely self motivated. That would be perfect because then people would be self-managed, and they would operate much like computers. Managers would just sit back and do nothing. That’s pretty much the way you’ve operated your company for a number of years.

How is that working out for you?”

“Not very well, Bill,” they replied honestly.

I continued on with the course, feeling better about getting buy in from the group that people really did need external positive reinforcement—and that a simple “Thanks!” goes a long way.

On the last day I decided it was time to evaluate myself.

“Ok guys, you’ve honored me with 2 days of your time, and a fair amount of your company’s training budget. I want to thank you for that and I want to ask you to grade me. During these past days, I have argued passionately that people need and deserve positive reinforcement and praise to help them perform better. And some of you have argued just as passionately that people should do it because it’s good for them . . . because safety is it’s own reward.

Now I would like to know how many of you feel that positive reinforcement has value and plan to use it with your team?”



27 out of 30 hands go up.



“That’s great! Now how many of you still believe that people should do things because it’s for their own good?” I asked.

The other 3 hands went up timidly.

My 3 favorite students who had argued against external reinforcement.

“Ok, so to sum up my progress here folks, 27 of you are believers in R+, and 3 of you aren’t. Now, I know you’ve paid your money and invested your 2 days with me in this course and I want to thank you for that. And no doubt you are all eager to get your CEU’s and receive your certificates of course completion. And I am delighted to provide 27 of you with that external praise and reinforcement.

Cause clearly, there are 3 of you who won’t need a certificate, or any CEU’s . . . after all, **you attended this course because it was for your own good . . . right?”**

My three favorite students broke into laughter and grinned sheepishly.

I decided to give them their CEU’s and Course certificates.

My point had been made. It was time to move on . . .

... Now, it's the next morning, and I'm to be introduced by a member of the Royal family ... and guess what? He needs 30 minutes of my 60 minute slot. I don't know about you, but I'm not in the habit of telling royalty "No". Sure thing boss, you go for it.

Which left me with the unenviable task of re-working my entire presentation feverishly while the Prince spoke. Sure enough, it's show time and I begin with *Green Beans & Ice Cream*, and we are rocking and rolling.

Until it was time for questions.

At the end, we had time only for one question, a young man who stood up and said,

“Mr. Sims, what would you say about a company that hires private police officers to monitor it's employees driving habits in their personal vehicles in their own time? It even goes so far as to fine them for speeding and penalize them and reduce their pay bonuses?”



I swallowed hard. 700 pairs of eyes focused on me to see my response.

“What company do you work for?” I asked him.

“I’d rather not say,” he replied, and the whole room laughed at once.

So, now you see how all the way in Bahrain, on the tip of Saudi Arabia,
I came to find myself between the rock and the hard place.

If I sided with the company, the audience would not like my message.
And if I sided with the audience, the company would be sure never to do business with me . . .

All at once I had become, the **Deer in the Headlights**.

Watch for my next blog to learn what went down next . . .