Commitment and Consistency

Remember cognitive dissonance?

Feeling of anxiety or tension

Arises when behaviors ≠ attitudes

“Please call if you have to change your plans.”

30% no show rate

“Will you please call if you have to change your plans?”

10% no show rate

Commitment and Consistency

Once we make a commitment, we feel pressure from ourselves and others to behave consistently with that commitment.

Beach Towel Study
(Moriarty, 1975)

Control group: no commitment

Experimental group: commitment:

“Could you please watch my things”

Results

Control Group  |  Experimental Group
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53% | 92%

This process is called...

The Foot-in-the-Door Technique

Here's another example...

Researchers asked 1/2 of the residents in an apt. complex to sign a petition to create a recreation center for the handicapped

2 weeks later, all residents were approached and asked to donate money to the cause.

This reflects a two-step process for the 1/2 of participants who signed the petition:

Step 1: obtain commitment (i.e., petition signature) Step 2: get consistency in behavior (i.e., donate $)
Foot-in-the-Door Technique

Compliance with small request increases chance of compliance with larger request later.

American Cancer Society Study
(Cialdini & Schroeder, 1976)

Control Group:
"I'm collecting money for the American Cancer Society. Would you be willing to help by giving a donation?"

Experimental Group:
"I'm collecting money for the American Cancer Society. Would you be willing to help by giving a donation. Even a penny would help."

Commitments "grow their own legs"
People add reasons and justifications to support the commitments they have made.
This causes prior commitments to be self-perpetuating because people will stick to their prior commitments even when the original factor leading to compliance is gone.

Low Ball Technique
Costs concealed until commitment is made.

Quit Smoking Study
(Joule, 1987)
Smokers asked to complete survey
After committing, told "no smoking"
85% 12%

Commitment and Consistency
Why does it work?
• Consistency is valued
• Consistency saves mental resources

Factors that Affect Commitment and Consistency
Is the commitment voluntary or forced?
• He that complies against his will is of his own opinion still
Is the commitment made in public or private?
Did the commitment take effort or not?
Is the commitment made actively or passively?

Aids Awareness Study
Active: answer 'YES' on 2 items
Passive: skip 2 items
74% 26%