

The Importance of Understanding Norms in Order to Change Behavior

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Disclaimer

This is hard work:

- There are no easy answers or quick fixes
- No silver bullets
- We did not get to this point overnight and we will not change it overnight

It can be done:

- Everyone has a role
- It will take time – years, maybe decades

Everyone Has an Important Role!

- Youth
- Parents and families
- Neighbors
- School staff
- Coaches and instructors
- Employers
- Health care providers
- Elected officials
- Merchants
- Religious leaders
- Law enforcement
- Prosecutors
- Judges
- Media
- Community & service organizations
- Government

History of Tobacco and Other Drug Abuse Prevention

- Scare Tactics
- Education and Awareness
- Social Skills
- Schools should prevent the problems!
- Law enforcement should stop the problems!

Individual Approaches Alone Do Not Seem to Work

- One person, one class, or one group at a time.
- There is always a new group that has not been affected by previous efforts.
- Participants leave presentations and are confronted with the “real world!”
- Lack of “stickiness”

Myth of Awareness Raising to Change Behavior

- Knowledge leads to...
 - Attitude change which leads to...
 - Behavior change
- If it worked no one would:
 - Smoke
 - Eat high fat foods
 - Not wear seat belts
 - Drink and drive

The Personal Responsibility Panacea

- The government should stay out of our lives!
- People ought to be responsible for themselves!
- Parents ought to be responsible for their children!

True, and if that was the case, no one would:

- Smoke
- Eat high fat foods
- Drink and drive, etc.

Need to Use a Comprehensive Policy-based Approach

Research clearly supports using a comprehensive approach.

Components of a comprehensive approach:

1. Education and awareness with persistent delivery of consistent messages (framed with values) to a variety of audiences from a variety of messengers,
2. Implementing and enforcing policies, in order to
3. Impact community norms.

What are Community Norms?

- Prevailing Attitudes
- Basis for attitudes and behaviors
- They determine what is acceptable and unacceptable behavior

Must Define the Community

- Can be a community defined by geography, culture, a school, a family, etc.
- Different groups within a “community” may have different norms

Norms May be Based on Perception or Reality

- In the absence of truth, perception becomes reality.
- So, it does not matter if it is true or not.
- One's reality is often based on perception.

Community Norms

"The norm is like a magnet."

"What's appropriate to do, in most people's minds, is what other people like them do."

Robert Cialdini, Professor, Arizona State University

Norms Can and Do Change

- We have seen many changes in (some of) our lifetimes.

For example:

- Smoking
- Tanning
- Littering
- Vending machines in schools
- What we eat and how much we eat
- Obesity
- Diabetes

Norms Can and Do Change

- Sizes of food portions have increased greatly which has increased:
 - Calories
 - Fat
 - Sodium
- Even the size of plates has increased!
 - The diameter of a typical dinner plate has increased from 25 cm (10 in) in the early 1980s to 30 cm (12 in) in the early 2000s an increase in surface area of 44% (Klara, 2004).

Plain Bagel

20 Years Ago



3-inch diameter
180 calories

Today



??? calories

A plain bakery bagel 20 years ago was 3 inches in diameter and had 140 calories. Today's plain bakery bagel, such as Bruegger's or Einstein's, has grown in diameter.

How many calories does it have?

200

300

500

"Super size it, please."

Most of the time fries are included in a value burger meal. For a little extra money, you can super size the burger meal and get bigger portions of food.



For a *little* money, you get *a lot* of extra calories in a meal.

REGULAR

590 calories =

Burger

Small fries

12-ounce Coke

SUPER SIZE

1650 calories =

Sandwich

Large fries

Super-sized Coke

Hamburger

20 Years ago



3 ounce patty
333 calories

Today



??? calories

Twenty years ago restaurant burgers were made with 3 ounce beef patties and contained about 333 calories. Over time, restaurant burgers have grown. How many calories are in burgers today?

300

510

740

French Fries

20 Years ago



2.4 ounces
210 calories

Today



??? Calories

2.4 ounces of French fries of 20 years ago had 210 calories.
How many calories are in today's fast food portion?

230

380

500

Soda

20 Years ago



12 fluid ounces 110
calories

Today



??? calories

Twenty years ago, 12 fluid ounces was the popular size for soft drinks and provided 110 calories. How many calories do you think are in today's popular soft drink portion?

150

210

410

Candy Bar

20 years ago



1 Bar (0.6 ounces)
90 calories

Today



??? calories

Twenty years ago, the most popular size chocolate bar available was 0.6 ounces and contained 90 calories. Today's portion has grown to King size. How many calories are in the King size candy bar?

210

310

391

Norms, Regulations, & Availability

- They work like a mobile
- They are interdependent
- If you change one, the others will change

Norms, Regulations & Availability

The probability of an undesirable behavior is decreased to the extent that:

- Community norms disapprove of the behavior.
- There exist regulations that discourage the behavior.
- The commodities needed to engage in the behavior are not readily available.

Norms Do Not Just Appear

- They are often created.
- Marketing and advertising have a large impact on norms
- There are business interests creating norms, affecting regulations and availability.

Assessing Community Norms

- Interviews (e.g., Key Informants)
- Surveys (e.g., Community Opinion)
- Community Readiness Assessments
- Focus Groups

Are the Norms What the Community Wants?

- Compare norms with community assessment information.
- Respond to what the community is saying.
- If they are not consistent you have an opportunity to work with the community to change the norms to fit with what they want.

Changing Community Norms

- Need to change perceptions
- Provide clear and accurate information
- Address misinformation
 - Everyone is not doing it!
 - At least it's only tobacco!
 - Chewing snus is safe!
 - Running is bad for your knees!
 - French fries are a vegetable!

Reframing

- What stories are we telling?
- What cues are we giving?
- What values are we activating?
- What actions are we advocating?

Reframing

- What is wrong?
- What does it matter?
- What should be done?

Changing Community Norms

- Implement and enforce policies
- Policies that are not enforced are worthless
 - Speed limits
 - Smoking laws

There are Many Barriers to Changing Norms

- Personal ambivalence and possible shame about own behaviors
- Lack of accurate information and confusion about the facts
- Perceptions of what “everyone is doing”
- Availability of healthy choices
- Business interests that frame the issues

And the Results (of the Norms) Are...

- 20% of Minnesotans eat five fruits/vegetables a day
- Obesity has increased 250% over the past 16 years¹.
 - One in four Minnesotans either have diabetes or are at high risk of developing it.^{1,2}
 - Over 300,000 Americans die every year from diseases related to nutrition and physical activity.³

1. Behavioral Risk Factor Surveillance System, CDC

2. National Health Interview Survey and the National Health and Nutrition Examination Survey 1999-2002

3. Mokdad, Ali H., PhD, et al, "Actual Causes of Death in the United States, 2000," Journal of the American Medical Association, March 10, 2004

And the Results (of the Norms) Are...

- Though decreasing, we still have about 20% of our population smoking.
 - Higher rates in some populations
 - Over 400,000 Americans die every year from smoking-related causes, (about one in five premature deaths).*

*Mokdad, Ali H., PhD, et al, "Actual Causes of Death in the United States, 2000," Journal of the American Medical Association, March 10, 2004

And the Results (of the Norms) Are...

- 7 of 10 deaths in the U.S. are from chronic diseases
- 75% of U.S. \$2.2 trillion budget is medical costs!

And the Results (of the Norms) Will Be?

- We know how we got here.
- What will we do to change these norms and results?
- You have an opportunity to start changing these norms!
- “To make it easier for people to beat the odds”
- Carpe diem!

And remember...

Everyone Has an Important Role!

- Youth
- Parents and families
- Neighbors
- School staff
- Coaches and instructors
- Employers
- Health care providers
- Elected officials
- Merchants
- Religious leaders
- Law enforcement
- Prosecutors
- Judges
- Media
- Community & service organizations
- Government
- And...