



Getting a Foot in the Door

Asking staff at your workplace to make small changes to their behaviour is one of the best ways to get them to make bigger changes in the future. It's the old 'foot in the door' trick.

In a classic experiment, a group of researchers in the US asked home owners for permission to install a 6 foot by 3 foot sign saying 'Drive Carefully' in their front yard. Not surprisingly, only 17% of residents said they would allow the sign. But by making one small change to the experiment the researchers were able to get permission from a staggering 76% of residents.

What was the change?

Two weeks before asking the residents for permission to erect the sign they asked them to display a small, relatively inconspicuous sign in their front window with the words 'Drive Carefully'. After displaying this small sign for two week the residents were significantly more likely to agree to hosting the large.

Why?

Well the evidence suggests that by agreeing to the small sign the residents began to see themselves as the 'type of person' to be concerned about worthy causes - like careful driving. And we like to be consistent with these types of values. So when we've made a public statement in support of something we're more like to make another - even bigger statement in the future.

So how can you use that in your workplace to encourage more sustainable behaviour?

Look for ways to encourage people to do small actions, like switching their computer off at night or using a reusable coffee mug. As long as they do it willingly and if you publicly acknowledge the behaviour, then they are more likely to undertake other, more significant activities in the future.

Reference: 'Yes! 50 Secrets From the Science of Persuasion' (Chapter 14). For more information about this book visit www.scienceofyes.com. If you've got any comments, questions or feedback on this article just e-mail greenworks@planetark.org