



Fostering Green Behaviour at Work

Gareth Kane

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Introduction

When organisations try to go green there is a tendency to focus on shiny new technology like solar panels and electric vehicles. However it has been estimated that 60-70% of internal environmental improvements are dependent on getting staff to change their behaviour. When I visit clients it is all too common to see heating and air-conditioning switched on in the same room, hosepipes left running but stuck down a drain, packaged products damaged by forklift trucks and potentially green technologies like teleconferencing facilities gathering dust. It is blindingly obvious that behavioural change is a vital plank of delivering green outcomes.

Why 'Switch It Off' Doesn't Work

The traditional approach to behavioural change has been to slather 'switch it off' stickers and posters over every switch, wall and machine. If behavioural change was that easy, you wouldn't be reading this document. So why doesn't it work?

- The injunctions to act get lost amongst the noise of the multitude of messages we are bombarded with every day;
- Most people resent being hectorred;
- There's no explanation of the benefits of this action either to the individual, the business or wider society;
- Familiarity breeds contempt – you soon stop noticing the signs;
- The message is uninspiring, lifeless and dull.

The Elephant Model of Culture Change

The best book I have read on the art of culture change for any goal is 'Switch' by Dan and Chip Heath¹. They use the model of an elephant guided by a human rider walking along a path. The direction the elephant follows is determined by three things – instructions provided by the rider, the desires of the elephant and the nature of the path. This analogy translates as:

- The rider is the logical, conscious part of our minds;
- The elephant is our subconscious which is usually the strongest influence on our behaviour whether we like it or not;
- The path is the environment we operate in, with easier and harder routes, and distractions along the way.

To change the direction the elephant is travelling, we must provide clear instructions to the rider, engage emotionally with the elephant, and shape the path to make

¹ Chip Heath, Dan Heath 2010, Switch: How to change things when change is hard, Random House Business

desired behaviour easy and undesirable behaviour difficult. The following sections give some options for applying these three elements in the pursuit of sustainability.

Providing Information for the Rider

Here are some ways that you can provide clear directions to the Rider:

- 'Switch it off' stickers (!) – they won't work on their own, but that's not to say they are altogether useless see below;
- Clear labelling of, say, segregated waste bins,
- Formal operating procedures for, say, factory machinery, should be written to promote green use of that machinery;
- Job descriptions should reflect environmental requirements eg giving energy efficiency targets to site managers;
- Job specific training eg eco-driving training for frequent drivers;
- Feedback: data provision through formal and informal channels will help 'nudge' people into better behaviour.

To make this communication effective, you must put yourself in the place of the intended audience. How can you make it clear, concise and relevant to them? Engineers and accountants like facts and figures, others may prefer a more graphical representation.

One of my favourite examples of 'switch it off' is from Northern Foods who use a three colour labelling system in their factories. A red label means "leave it on, whatever", green means "if this machine doesn't appear to be doing anything useful, switch it off" and amber means "if you think this machine should be switched off, check with your supervisor". This clear and empowering system is easy for a low skilled workforce, many of whom do not have English as a first (or sometimes second) language.

Inspiring the Elephant

At the end of the day it is the elephant that makes the decisions. We like to think we are logical, rational beings, but every one of us is heavily swayed by gut instinct, personal values, irrational prejudices and past experiences both positive and negative. It is this that makes us like Captain Kirk, not Mr Spock.

So how do you engage with the elephant and bring it around to your way of thinking? Here are some ideas:

- Show, don't tell. If you want people to understand how much waste you produce, try piling it up in the car park or factory yard so they can see it for themselves. You'll have a much bigger impact this way than showing data in an.
- Lead by example: whoever is leading the change must walk the walk, rather than talk the talk – cycle to work, install a solar panel at home, lead a group of volunteers to dig a pond;
- Find out what makes them tick: GPM Network, associates of ours, found that they could persuade employees at a charity to switch off their PCs at night by

comparing the savings to a £57 annual donation to the charity's projects, rather than using 'save the planet' type clichés.

- Make it fun: ditch the hair shirt and aim to be "more stilettos than sandals"². All communications should be positive and compelling. For example, instead of presenting statistics on Powerpoint, try a multiple choice quiz where employees have to guess the answers;
- Make it competitive: companies big and small have found that setting teams or even whole sites against each other to win a nominal prize for cutting paper use or their carbon footprint has generated huge improvements;
- Make it collaborative: elephants are herd animals, so get people working in teams. Award any incentive or prize to teams rather than individuals. Environmental champions can facilitate behaviour on a peer to peer level;
- Lastly, and my personal favourite, get employees involved in generating solutions. Anyone who has been on one of my training courses will almost certainly have been asked to apply the theory to their organisation. This approach empowers the employees, gives them a deeper understanding of the issues, creates buy-in and gives you a great source of ideas to boot.

Shaping the Path

When I first got started in this career, I routinely used to suggest to clients that, if they really wanted to boost paper recycling in their offices, they should take away everyone's general waste bins and give them a paper recycling bin. A general waste bin could be put in the corner of the office or at the end of the corridor – reversing standard practice where if people wanted to recycle, they had to trek to the recycling bin. In most cases those clients looked at me as if I was mad. Now this shift in bins is becoming standard practice.

The general point is that good behaviour should be made easy (eg promote cycling to work by providing good quality, covered cycle racks plus showers and lockers) and 'bad' behaviour should be more difficult (eg charging for staff parking permits).

Opportunities include:

- Changing the physical environment: eg location and labelling of bins, location and labelling of switches, zoning of lighting/heating systems;
- Providing easy green options: low carbon vehicles, provision for cyclists, teleconferencing, telecommuting (working from home);
- Elimination of perverse incentives: will your employees be out of pocket if they use a teleconference rather than travelling? Will someone cycling lose out in comparison to someone claiming mileage for their car? Are the procedures for using green options more onerous than standard options?

The best way to identify opportunities to shape the working environment to foster good behaviour is to ask your employees. Why do they follow certain paths? What would help them change?

² I pinched this phrase from Ashley Lodge of Harper Collins

Dealing with Difficult People

Every organisation has its fair share of nature's difficult people. They may believe that environmentalism is a pernicious form of communism, they may be too busy or they may simply not be interested, but they can stymie your efforts.

Never get into a toe to toe argument with a sceptic. Instead you should use what I call 'green jujitsu'. Unlike boxing where you and your opponent slug each other senseless, jujitsu is based on using your opponent's strength against them. Here are some proven green jujitsu techniques:

- Change your language to suit that person. For a crusty old engineer, talk about energy efficiency rather than carbon footprints. For a blinkered accountant talk about cost savings, liabilities and asset values rather than ethics;
- Use killer questions: what's the risk to us if fuel prices continue to rise? What are our future liabilities under cap and trade? Our customers are demanding we cut our carbon footprint – how do we respond? etc;
- Ask for help – stroke their egos. Can you help me benchmark our energy use against competitors? Can you help me develop our response to this new piece of legislation?;
- Ignore them and work with those who are receptive. Remember elephants are herd animals and most (save the odd rogue bull) will move when enough of the herd moves.

What Not To Do

Here are some classic blunders which should be avoided at all costs:

- Leaders not buying in: I've found that CEOs can be terrified of the sustainability agenda and have a tendency to always have another meeting to attend.
- Leaders not walking the walk: if the CEO does make a pronouncement of a green new tomorrow, turning up in a huge new company car the next day will spoil the effect;
- Unintended consequences of incentives: take care with financial incentives as they can produce all sorts of odd behaviours;
- Stirring up resentment. Some issues, for example staff parking, raise passions way beyond what they rightly should. It is a brave leader who rides roughshod over such issues – a jujitsu approach may be more effective;
- Misalignment of responsibility and authority. I've seen voluntary environmental champions given energy efficiency targets, but no authority to achieve them. That's like expecting a fish to ride a bicycle.

The Secret of Success

The secret of success in fostering green behaviour is to keep going. Culture change is like getting fit – you can't just go to the gym once and expect that to change everything. Instead you must set a programme of regular sessions and keep at it until the training becomes routine – but if the training starts to drop, so will your fitness levels. In the same way, to maintain good behaviour, the interventions you make must be routine.

About Gareth Kane

In Gareth's 13 years' experience in the environmental and sustainability sector he has worked with hundreds of organisations from micro-companies through to trans-national corporations, across many sectors including construction, pharmaceuticals, engineering and hospitality.

Gareth's is author of two books "The Three Secrets of Green Business" and "The Green Executive". The first is aimed at an operational level, the second looks at 'green' as a strategic leadership issue.

Gareth has a Bachelor's degree in Engineering from Cambridge University and a Master's Degree in Eco-Design at Newcastle University. He is a member of the Institute of Engineering and Technology and a Chartered Engineer.

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- Embedding Sustainability: working with our clients' staff to develop and implement sustainability programmes such our 'Lean, Mean & Green' service;
- Training: a wide range of off the shelf and bespoke training courses are available;
- Facilitation of events and workshops.

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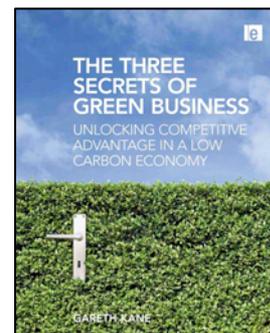
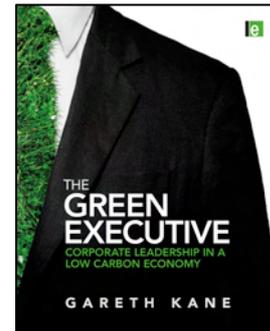
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Dale Robinson, MD,
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Nick Devitt
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