"Don't Tell Me What to Do": Exploring the Role of Psychological Reactance and How It Impacts Our Communications

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June 20, 2018 | 3:30 PM – 4:20 PM
Psychological Reactance

Overview

- What is psychological reactance
- Why it is important to our efforts
- Ways to reduce psychological reactance
- Future opportunities
Psychological Reactance

“Reactance – the motivation to regain a freedom after it has been lost or threatened – leads people to resist the social influence of others.”

“The day they passed a primary seat belt law was the last day I wore my seat belt.”

- A participant at one of our traffic safety workshops
Trait vs. State

Research seems to indicate a little of both.

- Physiological Responses
- Cognitive Responses

Reactance in Individualistic vs. Collective Cultures

Individualistic
“Them vs. me”

Collective
“Them vs. us”

Eliciting Reactance

1. Source
2. Message
3. Tone
Eliciting Reactance: Source
Eliciting Reactance: Message

“As any sensible person can see, there is really no choice when it comes to flossing.”

Eliciting Reactance: Tone

Partnership for Drug-Free Kids, https://drugfree.org/
Psychological Reactance

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Prevalence of Risky Behaviors:
Seat Belt Use in U.S.

Prevalence of Risky Behaviors:
Alcohol Impaired Driving

Prevalence of Risky Behaviors: High-Risk Drinking (i.e., binge drinking)

no 83%

Yes 17%

Preventing Risky Behaviors

As we see smaller and smaller populations engaging in risky behaviors, we need to be more attentive to the role psychological reactance may play.
Consequences of Reactance

• Adopt a position opposite to what is desired
• Make the risky behavior more attractive
• Reject the source of messages

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Reducing Psychological Reactance

Avoiding “forceful” language:

“should,” “ought,” “must,” “need”

Instead, try:

“consider,” “can,” “could,” “may”

Reducing Psychological Reactance

Choosing “Gain” vs. “Loss” language

Gain:
“When you use sun protection, you will gain benefits.”

Loss:
“When you do not use sunscreen, you will pay costs.”

Reducing Psychological Reactance

Pilot Testing
Psychological Reactance

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Explore How Positive Culture Improves Health and Safety
1. What was intriguing about this session and what do you want to know more about?

2. From your perspective, what tools or resources would you like on this topic?
June 21, 2018

8:30 AM – 9:00 AM  Networking

9:00 AM – 9:10 AM  Welcome

9:10 AM – 10:00 AM  Moving Beyond Bystander Engagement: Growing Safety Citizenship to Improve Health and Safety

10:00 AM – 10:15 AM  Morning Break

10:15 AM – 11:10 AM  Moving Beyond Bystander Engagement: Growing Safety Citizenship to Improve Health and Safety

11:10 AM – 12:00 PM  "Don't Just Look for Your Lost Keys Under the Street Light": Engaging Workplaces to Improve Health and Safety

12:00 PM – 1:15 PM  Lunch Provided

1:15 PM – 3:00 PM  The Importance of Social and Emotional Skills to Improve Health and Safety

3:00 PM – 3:15 PM  Afternoon Break

3:15 PM – 4:15 PM  "Shhh ... Let's Not Talk About That Now": Stigma - A Barrier to Progress

4:15 PM – 4:30 PM  Conclusion