

DESIGN 'NUDGES' FOR FITNESS: 7 TIPS TO ENCOURAGE PHYSICAL ACTIVITY AT WORK



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happier, healthier & wealthier
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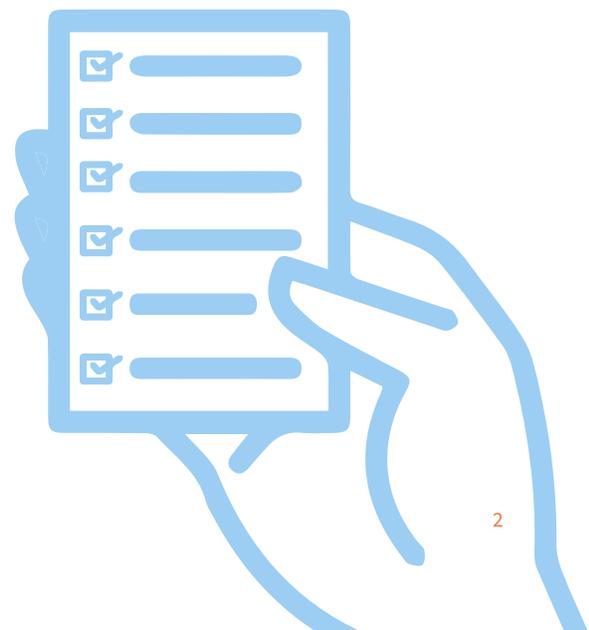
We worked with a larger insurance company to help them design workplace environments to encourage healthy eating and movement. To do this we did 3 behavioral audits of large well-known companies. We went into their cafeterias, their offices and their gyms. Then, we applied behavioral research to make recommendations that could drive behavior change. Below we offer 7 tips from the intensive research project that could be used in any workplace cafeterias.

WHAT'S A BEHAVIORAL DIAGNOSIS?

The process of figuring out how well something is designed to encourage a key behavior is what we call a Behavioral Diagnosis. It is a detailed, step by step analysis of how users actually behave, and it starts once you know what your key behavior is.

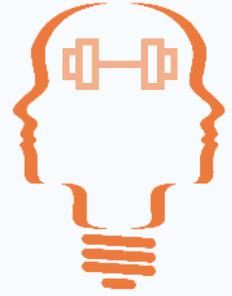
WHY DO A BEHAVIORAL DIAGNOSIS?

A behavioral diagnosis is an approach to problem solving that starts with deeply understanding the important influence of the environment on people's decisions. By zooming in to each step and every detail of the whole process surrounding the key behavior, it becomes much easier to figure out the where, when and how of tweaking the environment.



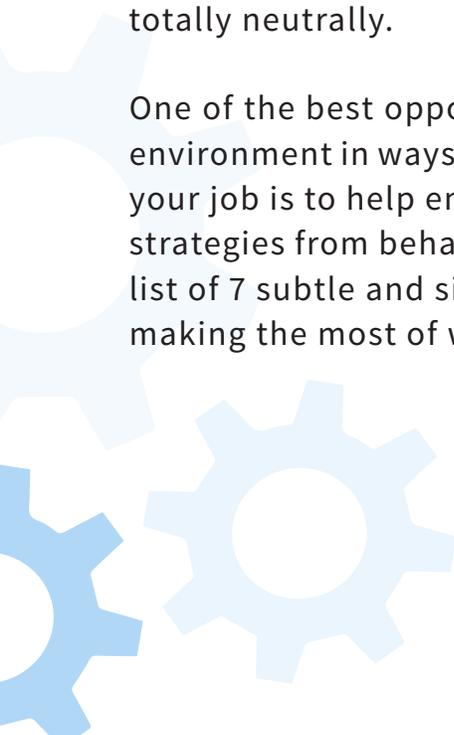
WHO THIS IS FOR:

Health and Benefits Managers
Employee Wellness Program Managers
Employee Gym Managers



Research in behavioral economics suggests that small and subtle details in our environment, like the placement of a stairwell and elevator in a building, influence our decisions every day. These environmental cues and suggestions, sometimes known as choice architecture, can influence how we behave and the choices we make, since many of our decisions are made quickly, without careful consideration. For example, we might hastily decide to take the convenient elevator in the lobby instead of the less-convenient stairs, rather than think carefully about whether this choice helps meet our long-term fitness goals. Even when a building designer or program implementer has no intention of swaying people's choices, unbeknownst to her, the smallest design details can end up influencing behavior -- no program or facility can be designed totally neutrally.

One of the best opportunities to promote an active lifestyle is to design the workplace environment in ways that 'nudge' people towards being more physically active. If part of your job is to help ensure your company's employees are healthy, then applying simple strategies from behavioral economics can help make your task easier. Below, we offer a list of 7 subtle and simple tips that can be used to enhance onsite workplace efforts by making the most of what you already provide.



1. INCREASE THE AVAILABILITY OF FITNESS AND EXERCISE AMENITIES



Why? To put it simply, the more available something is, the more likely it is that we will use it.¹ In order for employees to use exercise areas and fitness equipment, it's best if it is centrally located, free, and easily accessible.

- ✓ Place gyms in a central, on-site location. Provide at least one additional exercise space for on-site exercising beyond the gym, like basketball, volleyball, or squash courts).
- ✓ Provide free (or subsidized) gym-membership to remove the payment barrier.
- ✓ Make bike racks available near the building entrance at a “prime” location to encourage biking rather than driving. Relatedly, if the company has a large worksite/campus, make bikes available (for free!) to people who need to get from building to building.

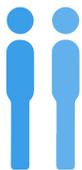
2. MAKE PHYSICAL ACTIVITY MORE CONVENIENT



Why? Related to availability, making exercise areas easier to access and more comfortable removes key barriers to engaging in physical activity.

- ✓ Place stairwells within 24 feet of elevators and mark them with clear signs. Stairs should be well-lit and visibly appealing to nudge people to avoid using the more convenient elevator.²
- ✓ Make the open-hours of the gym broad and convenient to coincide with times employees can be away from work, such as over the weekend and early in the morning.
- ✓ Cater to employees working off-site by using convenient, innovative methods such as online/virtual fitness classes.
- ✓ Provide a range of helpful amenities in the gym (such as a shower, towels, water fountain, lockers/ locks, or a laundry service for gym clothes).

3. MAKE IS SOCIAL



Why? Increasing the social element to fitness and challenges is an important value add that can increase the appeal, power and impact of engaging in a fitness activity.³ Social incentives increase motivation and make people more accountable to each other. Additionally, changing people's perceptions about the 'social norms' surrounding an active lifestyle, for example by showing the exercise habits of coworkers, can encourage people to adopt similar lifestyles.⁴

- Place gyms in visible locations to demonstrate that exercise is the workplace 'social norm.'
- Facilitate group activity by helping people get on a team sport (on campus or off), putting on team challenges, or sponsoring a company-wide 5k run or walk.
- Encourage employees to bring a buddy (co-worker) to the gym.
- Provide free activity trackers (like fitbits) as part of an overall wellness program in which there are shared group statistics and incentives.

3. SET THE DEFAULT FOR THE HEALTHIEST OPTION



Why? Many people are more likely to stick with the status quo and select the default option than to seek out or actively choose an alternative option.⁵ Defaults refer to the option, choice or behavior that is selected automatically (or pre-selected) for us. When possible, set the default for the healthiest decision.

- Automatically sign up eligible employees for the gym by default. Any official paperwork needed can be signed a few weeks later (keep forms less than 1 page).
- Automatically sign up new employees for a tour of the gym as part of their onboarding or orientation, which removes the barriers of not knowing where the gym is, or having to remember to go there and sign up.
- Automatically install computer programs that remind employees to move (such as Move for iOS) on employee's computers and remind them to use them.

4. BUILD FITNESS INTO THE REGULAR ROUTINE



Why? Processes and programs that build exercise into normal routines lead to long-term habit formation, and help people continuously stay on track to reach their goals.

- ✓ Set-up “walking meetings” in the calendaring software as an option in the location drop-down.⁶
- ✓ Put on regularly scheduled company fitness events such as Walking Mondays or Bike to Work Tuesdays.
- ✓ Put on company-wide fitness challenges that last eight-weeks or longer to help employees build a routine that leads to long-term habit formation.⁷
- ✓ Provide equipment to encourage employees to regularly exercise while working, such as sit/stand desks, desks with treadmills or bike desks.

5. HELP PEOPLE STICK TO THEIR GOALS THROUGH PRE-COMMITMENT



Why? Pre-committing to a goal is one of the most effective behavioral strategies to achieve positive change, for a variety of reasons. In general, we may know that we want to exercise to be healthy, we just don't want to do it right now. Pre-commitment works because people are more likely to commit to performing an action in the future than today. In this sense, commitments we implement today can help ‘lock us in’ to a certain course of action in the future. Being accountable to commitments and goals can effectively boost performance, especially if commitments are made publicly.⁸

- ✓ Ask employees to set specific goals and make public commitments to meet those goals (such as pledging to bike to work at least one day a week).
- ✓ Ask people to sign-up for long-term gym memberships rather than single-day passes.
- ✓ Ask employees to commit to attending fitness classes by signing up online. Once people have booked a class (by signing up or making an appointment with a trainer), it makes it harder for them to create a reason for themselves not to attend once the time actually comes.
- ✓ Allow employees to sign up for a free session with a trainer, which adds a powerful accountability component.

6. PROVIDE THE RIGHT KIND OF INCENTIVES AND REWARDS



Why? Providing positive reinforcement and rewards—financial, social, recreational, reputational or otherwise—is another strategy that can motivate short-term fitness goals, which can ultimately lead to long-term success.

- ✓ Help people focus on easily-reached, immediate goals by positively reinforcing each small step (not just the final outcome) when participating in fitness events. Relatedly, reward employees for participation and for continuing to stick to their fitness regime.
- ✓ Offer rewards that people care about and would like to win. Tangible objects like t-shirts or a specific prize relevant to the participant (like a preferred parking space for employees) can be great incentives.

7. SEND SUBTLE CUES TO HELP PEOPLE REMEMBER TO EXERCISE



Why? Our attention is limited, but wired to notice changes in the environment. Visible and recurring reminders counteract the “out of sight, out of mind” phenomenon that leads us to sometimes forget about our long-term interests. Environmental reminders can be anything that reminds people of what’s important—like a sign, a checklist, or an email.

- ✓ Paint steps on the floor that lead to the gym to add a permanent, visible reminder.⁹
- ✓ Put up a sign for the gym on a main pathway that the majority of employees walk by.
- ✓ Show gym membership as a line item on employees paylips (even if it’s free), since being reminded of a cost and recurring service can effectively encourage attendance.



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Irrational Labs is a nonprofit that applies and tests insights from behavioral economics to address product, marketing, and societal problems. We have deep expertise in partnering with companies and organizations to design and test behavioral interventions to increase people's health, wealth and happiness. We also frequently lead workshops with companies to integrate the behavioral science approach into their organizations.

¹ Rozin, S. Scott, M. Dingley, J. K. Urbanek, H. Jiang, and M. Kaltenbach, "Nudge to Nobesity I: Minor changes in accessibility decrease food intake," *Judgment and Decision Making*, vol. 6, no. 4, pp. 323–332, 2011.

² Gandhi, Linnea (2015) So you want to jump on the nudging bandwagon? Start with your employees. Retrieved from <http://www.misbehavingbook.org/blog/2015/12/29/so-you-want-to-jump-on-the-nudging-bandwagon-start-with-your-employees>

³ Kullgren JT, Troxel AB, Loewenstein G, et al. (2013) Individual-versus group-based financial incentives for weight loss: a randomized, controlled trial. *Ann Intern Med*. 2013;158(7):505-14

⁴ Zimmerman, F. J. (2009). Using behavioral economics to promote physical activity. *Preventive Medicine*, 49(4), 289–291. doi:10.1016/j.ypmed.2009.07.008

⁵ Johnson, E. J., & Goldstein, D. (2003). Do Defaults Save Lives? *Science*, 302, 1338–1339. doi:10.1126/science.1091721

⁶ 7 powerful reasons to take your next meeting for a walk. Retrieved from: <http://www.inc.com/peter-economy/7-powerful-reasons-to-take-your-next-meeting-for-a-walk.html>

⁷ Lally, P., Van Jaarsveld, C. H. M., Potts, H. W. W., & Wardle, J. (2010). How are habits formed: Modelling habit formation in the real world. *European Journal of Social Psychology*, 40(6), 998–1009. doi:10.1002/ejsp.674

⁸ Ariely, D., & Wertenbroch, K. (2002). Procrastination, deadlines, and performance: self-control by precommitment.

⁹ *Psychological Science : A Journal of the American Psychological Society / APS*, 13(2000), 219–224. doi:10.1111/1467-9280.00441 Nudging litter into the bin. Retrieved from <http://www.inudgeyou.com/green-nudge-nudging-litter-into-the-bin/>