

Don't Tolerate Bad Behavior

In last month's column, I referenced the noted behavioral psychologist, B.F. Skinner, in a discussion of the psychology of printing sales and sales management. As Skinner demonstrated in his laboratories, *any behavior which is rewarded will tend to be repeated*. That scientific finding represents the absolute foundation of motivational psychology.

As I noted last month, though, there's also sort of a "flip side" to Skinner's work which goes something like this...*any behavior which is tolerated will also tend to be repeated*. I think that statement explains a lot of what's wrong in most quick/digital/small commercial printshops today.

Far too many printers tolerate far too much bad behavior...from employees, customers and even suppliers. I think one of the secrets to success—and happiness!—in business today is to take action whenever you're not seeing the behavior you want. In my experience, the "worst-case scenario" usually happens when somebody lets something slide just too far.

Training vs. Discipline

In my high school—which was both *long ago* and *far away!*—we had a principal and two vice-principals. The principal was the General Manager of the school, with overall responsibility for both the business side of the operation and the academic/extra-curricular side. One of the vice-principals was the Director of Academics, and the other one was the Director of Discipline. (Those weren't their official titles, of course, but they pretty well describe these two people's responsibilities.)

The Director of Academics was a small woman in her 50's, and about as non-confrontational a person as you'd ever hope to find. Her job was to educate us and teach us good behavior, i.e. how to become good citizens. The Director of Discipline was a very large man in his 40's who could—and would—get in your face. His job was to enforce good behavior. They made a pretty good team, I think, largely because they both understood that it had to be a team effort.

Last month I quoted the equation that defines Newton's Second Law of Motion: $F = M \times A$, or Force equals Mass times Acceleration. Here's the equation that defines Fellman's First Law of Good Behavior In The Printing Industry: $GB = T > (D)$, or Good Behavior comes from Trainning reinforced by Discipline whenever necessary.

Take a good look at that equation. The most important thing for you to understand is that training *must* come before discipline. There's an age-old question: Does Johnny foul up at his job because he's a jerk, or because he doesn't know how to do his job in the first place, or because he doesn't know how *you* want him to do things? The answer to the question is that Johnny can only be a jerk if he *does* know how to do his job—both how to operate whatever machines he may be operating, and specifically how you want things done in your printshop—and then he still doesn't do it.

If that's the case, Johnny needs discipline. If it's not the case, what Johnny needs is training!

Training vs. Education

How about customers who exhibit bad behavior? For some reason, we only use the word "training" when it applies to employees. When we talk about changing customer behavior, we tend to use the word "education."

That's OK, as long as you realize that we're talking about exactly the same thing. "Training" or "education," the first step toward success at changing bad behavior is to define better behavior. If you don't establish a target, how can you really expect an employee—or a customer or a supplier—to hit it?

Targeting Process

Here's how you go about doing that. Start with a clean sheet of paper, and draw a vertical line right down the middle. Pick an employee to start with, and on the left side of the line, write down the things you like about this person and the way he/she does his/her job. On the right side, write down the things you don't like. Once you know what you *like* and what you *don't like*, the next step is to define what you *want*. Flip the paper over, and start making a list of your behavior objectives for this person. What does he/she need to learn or do in order to become a more valuable contributor to your business?

Remember, the "learn" part has to come first. If your employee doesn't already know how to do what you want him/her to do, you have to teach it before you can rightfully and reasonably expect it. Remember, too, that Rome

wasn't built in a day! It will probably be a good idea to have short-term and intermediate objectives on the way to any major behavior change.

It's also important to prioritize the behavior changes you want to see. Let's say that your particular Johnny needs work on basic press operation and technique, keeping his working area neat and orderly, showing up on time in the morning, and getting along with your other employees. I personally wouldn't want to take on all of that at one time.

The first thing I'd do is sit Johnny down and explain that coming in late is simply against the rules, and that from this point forward, I would give him only three chances to correct that behavior. "The next time you're late," I'd tell him, "I'll let it go, because I know that there's traffic and things that really are beyond your control. But if there's a second time within 30 days, I will give you a written job warning, and if there's a third time within any 6-month period, I will send you home for that day without pay. If there's a fourth time, I will send you home permanently."

I would also make arrangements for Johnny to start getting the training he needs on press operation and technique. Most quick printers have a variety of resources available to help with that training, ranging from press manufacturers to service and repair companies to franchise trainers or other franchisees or even other nearby independent printers. I have a client who hired a fellow PrintImage International member's press operator to come to his shop on six successive Saturdays to provide training. There was a cost involved, of course—including overtime pay rates for both press operators and a little extra "sweetener" to provide the trainer with an incentive to give up six Saturdays in a row and drive the 80 miles each way—but cost isn't the only issue, is it? There's a lot of truth to the old saying that you have to spend money to make money, although I think it might be helpful to express that thought a little bit differently. How about this way...you often have to spend money to solve the problems that are *keeping you* from making money.

You also have to spend time, and recognize that all of this will take time. If I could get Johnny immediately on track as far as getting to work on time, and improve his technical performance on the press over a 2-3 month period, I'd feel like I was well on the way to improving my overall situation. Once I started to see that performance improvement, I'd start teaching him how to keep his work area clean, and how to get along better with the rest of the staff.

Please note my exact words. I'd start *teaching* him! I'd make my expectations clear to him, show him exactly what I wanted him to do and how I wanted him to do it, and then hold him accountable for meeting and maintaining my expectations. GB = T > (D). Good Behavior comes from Training reinforced by Discipline whenever necessary.

With A Salesperson

Let's say that your "Johnny" is a salesperson. The process works exactly the same way. What do you like? What do you not like? What do you want? What does Johnny need to learn or do in order to become a more effective salesperson and a more valuable contributor to your business?

One typical problem is the salesperson who's not bringing in enough new business. Another typical—and often related—problem is the salesperson who spends too much time in the shop "supervising" his/her jobs and not enough time prospecting.

As I wrote last month, the strategic solution to both of these problems is to manage the behavior that leads to the identification and development of new business. That behavior starts with prospecting and follow up activity—cold calls, networking, research and referral-gathering, followed by phone calls, faxes, letters, e-mails—and experience has shown that a salesperson who puts forth enough of this behavior/activity will end up with face-to-face appointments—where the real selling gets done—and those conversations will motivate some of the salesperson's prospects to eventually become customers.

As a sales manager, you have to motivate this behavior, and your best strategy for doing that probably involves some pushing—to overcome inertia and get a stalled salesperson into motion—along with the "pulling power" you'll get if you reward your salesperson for exhibiting the desired behavior. The push can be accomplished by setting "action standards"—how many cold calls, how much networking activity, how much research and referral-gathering, then how many phone calls, faxes, letters and e-mails sent as follow-up.

"These are not goals," you might say to your salesperson. "They're not 'objectives' that I hope you'll reach. The bottom line here is that your continued employment is predicated on you hitting these 'action standards.'"

Don't think for a minute that pushing and pulling is enough, though, Please don't forget the training component of this equation. All the effort in the world won't produce the results you're looking for if the "actions" are poorly executed. GB = T > (D)!

And please remember that the real key—the *tactical* solution to this problem—is to act to make good things happen, not to tolerate the sort of behavior that will lead to continued under-performance.

With A Customer

Most of the printers I work with seem willing to at least try to change the behavior of problem employees. Many of them have been pleasantly surprised by how well the process can work. Nobody really seems to want to apply the

same process to customers, though. “You need to say ‘yes’ to customers,” one printer told me. “You only get into trouble when you say ‘no’ to them.”

Here’s my perspective. You’re already in trouble with your problem customers! They are draining time, money and other resources out of your business—read that: profit!—and they’ll continue to do so unless you do something about it!

Here’s how I would address this problem. First, I’d step up my marketing activity. There’s always a chance that a customer won’t change his/her bad behavior, so let’s start the process of replacing them before we stress the relationships. Next, I’d go through the same “clean sheet of paper” exercise that I suggested earlier for employees. It’s important to make sure that you really understand the situation.

Third, I’d reach out to the customer, and explain the situation the way I saw it, and make my suggestions for improving the way we do business together. Finally, I’d ask my customer for his/her perspective on what I see as a problem, and my suggested solution to that problem.

Again, a big part to the key to success in this business—the tactical solution to any problems you have with your customers—is to act rather than to tolerate bad behavior. Do you take some risk? Yes, you do. But remember what I said earlier about the “worst-case” scenario. It’s what usually happens when somebody lets something slide just too far.