

Shaping Beliefs and Attitudes

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A poster seen in many classrooms proclaims, "Attitude is Everything." And, in contemporary schools, that is probably very close to the truth. We attribute success and failure to a student's attitude and even forgive poor performance if a student displays a positive attitude toward our class or the school. We talk about the need for some students to change their attitudes, and lament those who change them for the worse. We reward positive attitudes, punish negative ones, and, in general, believe that everything in our school would be better if everyone had a better attitude.

The same occurs among adults in the school as well. Principals and teachers complain about groups of their colleagues with negative attitudes toward kids or the school. Parents are grateful when they find their child's teachers have a pleasant attitude, and the attitudes of administrators and board members are frequent topics of staff lounge conversation.

Just like the weather, there's a lot of talk about attitude, but no one seems to do much about it. Granted, it is often difficult to change attitudes, but, with some effort, it is quite possible to do so. And, as most innovators would agree, unless there is a positive attitude in a school toward new ideas, they are not very likely to succeed. In short, a positive attitude is a prerequisite for meaningful school change. Indeed, attitude is everything.

What Are Attitudes?

An attitude is simply a predisposition to approach or avoid an idea, event, person or object. In other words, it is a tendency to act in one way or another toward an "attitude object." In some cases, these attitude objects can be quite specific, such as a food, color, or individual. They can also be somewhat less specific. For example, someone who has a negative attitude toward "change" would probably extend it to anything representing change -- leaders, technology, meetings...the list is nearly endless.

Where do Attitudes Come From?

Our attitudes result from some very complex forces, but *they are learned*. And what is learned can be unlearned and changed.

We developed some of our attitudes by *copying those of people who were important to us*, particularly parents or older siblings. Some of our strongest preferences and convictions, such as for religious beliefs, come to us in this way.

Others we found by *trying out an idea and being rewarded or punished for doing so*. This is often the case with beliefs about social issues.

Some attitudes we were just *talked into* forming, perhaps by a particularly persuasive friend or some especially dramatic demonstration. Often our attitudes about the environment or politics come from information and persuasive communications.

In this chapter, we will look at each of these approaches in some detail, not just to understand how our attitudes came to be, but to plan for systematic attitude formation and change in our schools as well. At the end of this resource unit, you will have a chance to identify the source of an attitude (perhaps your own) and develop a plan for changing it in a positive way.

Why Are We Concerned with Attitudes?

For anyone who wishes to improve student achievement or behavior in the schools, attitude is critical. Student attitudes toward the school and the people who work in them determine much of their behavior. If they have negative attitudes (e.g., avoidance of the attitude object), they are likely to be truant, disconnected or even disrupt teaching and learning. If teachers have negative attitudes toward certain students, they may avoid contact with those students, or, worse, express their negative attitudes either directly or indirectly and invite student hostility and anger.

Further, if a school sets out to change an academic policy (perhaps to do away with rigid tracking), some teachers may be resistant enough to assure that the change is not successful. In such cases, meaningful change can occur only when there is a widespread attitude of acceptance for the innovation.

Public relations experts learned long ago that information alone is seldom enough to change beliefs and attitudes about a new idea or practice. Indeed, one of their most treasured beliefs is "don't fertilize the rocks"...don't waste time giving information to those who are absolutely resistant to a new idea. First, try to make them less resistant to receiving the information.

How Can You Change Attitudes?

Psychologists have identified three major approaches to attitude change: cognitive, social and behavioral.

Cognitive approaches rely upon changing the way people think about an attitude object. Most often, this is done by using information or persuasive communication to introduce conflict, or dissonance, between the old attitude and the new one.

Behavioral approaches rely on reinforcements and punishments. Because we are inclined to repeat those behaviors that are rewarded, this approach calls for the conscious reward of positive attitudes as they are expressed. The reward increases the chance the attitude will be expressed again, and, ultimately, incorporated into the individual's belief system.

Social approaches rely on our tendency to copy the beliefs and behaviors of other people we

admire. People, especially children, exposed to attitudes expressed by attractive role models tend to adopt those attitudes as their own. And, if they are rewarded for doing so, they will sustain them over time.

Cognitive Learning and Attitude Change

One very powerful model of attitude change is based on the theories of cognitive scientists such as Jerome Bruner. These claim that new attitudes are learned in essentially the same way all new information is learned: our existing cognitive structures are altered to accommodate new information or observations of our world.

According to cognitivists, we are perfectly capable of holding two contradictory beliefs or notions as long as we are not made aware of them. Once we are aware of them, cognitive dissonance occurs. Dissonance is the uncomfortable feeling we get when we realize that something we believe to be true may not be.

How Does Dissonance Change Attitudes? Someone who sees himself as an environmentalist may support all types of conservation efforts, including reducing the use of fossil fuels. At the same time, he may drive a large, elderly, gas guzzling, pre-emission-control automobile. As long as he remains unaware of this discrepancy between his beliefs and his behavior, no problem exists. However, as soon as he is made aware of the discrepancy, he must do something about it.

When he is finally asked, "How can you claim to be an environmentalist and still drive a car like that?" the issue is made evident and dissonance is introduced. Now, he has three choices: he can

- (a) deny the evidence that automobile emissions contribute to air pollution, he can
- (b) alter his behavior and obtain a more fuel-efficient car, or he can
- (c) alter or rationalize his beliefs by saying that he drives a large car because it provides safety for his family or helps to preserve his family's economic resources.

In all cases, he is trying to reduce dissonance. Innovators hope that dissonance is reduced by changing behavior in the desirable way, or altering the belief or attitude so that is more receptive to a new practice. Chances are almost as good, though, that the individual will deny the evidence being presented, particularly if it contradicts long-standing knowledge.

Can You Be Talked Into Changing An Attitude? Yes, indeed. That's when persuasive communication may be useful to produce dissonance. In school improvement, dissonance can be a very useful tool in stimulating change. Often, the dissonance is produced by new information, convincingly presented, so that the individual finds him or herself agreeing with it. After this agreement is achieved, the innovator can point out the apparent contradictions between what the individual has just agreed to and existing school practices.

How Does it Work? A consultant may present information about young adolescent development in such a convincing way that teachers agree with her observations and conclusions. At that point, the teachers can easily identify existing school practices that contradict the information they have just agreed to about adolescent development. Once this dissonance has been introduced, the climate is right for discussing changes that can be made in discipline practices so they conform to what is known about the nature of the learner. That, in turn, reduces the dissonance that exists between beliefs and institutional practices.

The steps in this process are straightforward:

- X Identify the attitude object. What, specifically, is the objective of your attitude change strategy?
- X Introduce information with which the individuals agree.
- X Contrast the new information with existing beliefs or practices.
- X Identify ways to change the practice or belief to conform to the new information.

How Much Information? While it is not possible to change beliefs with information alone, it is possible to shape attitudes with information that is convincingly presented and which creates cognitive dissonance. It is most effective to use relatively small amounts of information at strategic times to encourage the formation of desirable attitudes. Too often, innovators are tempted to deluge the staff with information in an effort to smother any opposition to a change. Such strategies seldom succeed. Relevant information, provided at just the right time, will have a much more dramatic impact than general information introduced before the individual senses any need for it.

A Student Example

Successful counselors often use cognitive dissonance to change student behavior and attitudes. They might ask the student "What do you want to happen?" "What are you doing to make it happen?" "Is it working?" "What can you do differently to get the outcome you want?" This approach succeeds because it focuses on specific outcomes and specific behaviors which the counselor links together, logically, in the mind of the student. When the student's behavior is not producing the outcome he or she wants, the motivation to change the behavior is strengthened.

Behavioral Approaches to Attitude Change

Behavioral scientists, such as Gagne and Skinner, tell us that behaviors, opinions, and attitudes that are rewarded and reinforced are likely to be repeated and, ultimately, incorporated into our personal value set and routine behavior.

How Does it Work? To use this approach, school leaders must reinforce desired attitudes and not reward undesirable attitudes. In concrete terms, staff members who are favorably disposed toward a change, or those who are undecided but open to information about the innovation, might be reinforced by being sent to a conference on the subject or to visit a school district that already uses the innovation. Teachers who wish to try something new might be given additional supply money, or a chance to order computer software or other materials related to the innovation. If possible, released time for teachers can be arranged to engage in planning for the innovation or for exploring it further on their own.

In every case, though, certain principles apply.

1. The reinforcement should be fairly specific (ranging from a concrete reward, such as money or released time, to a less tangible one, such as recognition or compliments by other staff members or the administration).
2. The reward must be clearly linked to the desirable behavior or attitude, not for being a "good boy" or "good girl." It is not enough to send a teacher to a conference because they supported the administration's efforts in a general way. The innovator must make

clear why the teacher is being sent: "You have shown some interest in this new discipline system, so I'd like you to go the state middle school conference and find out more about it."

3. The reward should be intermittent. It should not be given every time the attitude or behavior is demonstrated. If a reward is expected every time, it is seen as compensation for the attitude, not as a reward for it. Generally, intermittent rewards are most effective for long-term attitude change.
4. The reward must also be seen as desirable. If the principal is not popular with students, he or she should not be the one to publicly reward a student. Such recognition may, in fact, extinguish the desirable behavior, because recognition by the principal may be cause for ostracism by the rest of the students. (In which case the reward actually becomes a punishment...something to be avoided at all costs!!)

The wise use of rewards and reinforcements increases the chance that the recognized individual will repeat the desirable attitude and may serve also as an incentive for others to adopt the attitude as well. For this to occur, though, everyone must believe that they can get the reward. If some students believe that no matter what they do the teachers will not recognize their efforts, behavioral approaches to attitude change will not work for that group. The distribution of rewards and reinforcements must always be seen as fair and evenhanded.

A Student Example.

The cafeteria was a mess in an Ohio middle school. To change the student's attitudes toward keeping it clean, the faculty organized a contest among the three lunch period groups. An elected body of "inspectors" from each lunch period rated the cafeteria on a number of cleanliness scales after each group left the room. Each day, the ratings were posted for each group, with the promise that the group with the best rating each month would be the principal's guest for a free pizza lunch. Not only did individual behavior improve, but the group began to enforce higher standards of cleanliness among their peers. The net result was a much cleaner and more attractive environment.

Social Approaches to Attitude Change

Social learning theorists, such as Albert Bandura, say that attitudes and behaviors are learned through our interactions with the social world in which we live. Our attitudes, beliefs, values and behaviors tend to be learned, or, more accurately, copied from others in our social world.

How Does it Work? To a large degree, being accepted by a group requires that we accept that group's norms and behavior. Because of an intense human need for both acceptance and membership, most of us are willing to conform quite a bit to remain in the group. Thus, some of us may find ourselves in the awkward position of pretending to enjoy a sexist joke at a wedding reception, for example, because to do otherwise would brand us as an "outsider".

The extent to which we accept the norms of the group depends upon how strongly we wish to be a member of it. Because we may wish to be part of the wedding party we may not raise an issue about an off-color joke, recognizing that we are guests in this family gathering. To raise the issue would not only result in our exclusion, but would make the people who really "belong" there

uncomfortable as well.

In fact, it is this sense of belonging that determines whether or not we will attempt to police the behavior of other group members. If someone feels very much like the member of a group, they are likely to exert influence on the behavior of other group members. If the brother of the groom said that he thought an off-color joke was inappropriate, the group will probably alter its behavior. Further, because of his status in the group, his opinion, while perhaps discomfiting, is seen as completely legitimate.

In the school change process, social approaches to attitude formation and change can be very powerful. The extent to which the new attitude or the new behavior is accepted as a social norm for the group will determine both its longevity and its influence. If the group members accept the new idea as a norm, they will actively influence each other, rewarding expressions of the new attitude, perhaps punish unacceptable attitudes, and be sure the attitude is shared with newcomers to the school.

Two Social Approaches

Two powerful social processes shape attitudes and behaviors: modeling and consensus. Modeling occurs when a respected member of the group exhibits a behavior or attitude that other group members then emulate. The power of a model of affect group attitudes depends upon his or her status with the group and upon the cohesiveness of the group as a whole.

Strategy One: Modeling

The status of the model is important because group members tend to imitate the highest status individuals in it. Therefore, if highly respected, veteran teachers advocate a change, they will influence the rest of the group's attitudes much more readily than if a novice newcomer does. For school leaders, this means that it is essential to cultivate the cooperation of highly respected staff members to support an innovation.

The change will become permanent in the group if there is a high degree of cohesiveness, the extent to which individuals wish to be members of the group. In highly cohesive groups, changes tend to be accepted readily, and the members tend to conform strictly to the new norm. In low cohesive groups, there is no particular motivation to be accepted as a group member, so conformity to group norms is very low.

Furthermore, cohesiveness tends to be a function of how the group was constituted. Voluntary groups tend to be very highly cohesive; required membership groups tend to be low cohesive. This means that, in its initial phases, an innovation is likely to be sustained best by a group that has volunteered to try it out. Allowing one voluntary group (whether it is a team, an informal group of teachers or a whole school faculty) to try out an innovation helps to assure both the success of the innovation and permits the use of that group as a model for others in the school.

A School Example of Modeling

In one school change project, a group of faculty was comprised of the most respected members of the school to address the critical issues of the discipline program. The purpose of the group was not to avoid controversy or achieve a quick consensus, but to allow the most influential people in the system to work out acceptable positions that they could advocate among their colleagues and peers.

Strategy Two: Consensus

Social change models also rely heavily upon consensus. Once a group has agreed upon a vision, a goal or a practice, it is very tenacious. Therefore, it is critical that change agents make use of consensus building to influence the attitudes of the affected groups.

Group consensus is a process in which all members understand the issue, everyone has a chance to express an opinion, and those who continue to doubt the decision understand it and are willing to try it for a prescribed period without sabotaging it. Consensus differs from a unanimous decision because not everyone necessarily agrees with it. However, they agree to go along with the group and not interfere with the practice, at least for a while.

In building consensus, several principals are very critical:

1. It is easier to achieve consensus on broad statements than on specific ones. Faculties are more likely to agree that “students must be taught to accept responsibility for their own behavior,” than on specific sanctions if they fail to accept that responsibility.
2. Everyone must participate in expressing opinions about the innovation. This helps to prevent the tyranny of the minority, in which a small number of people, without ever participating in the process, sabotage a project. Failure to assure that all issues, concerns and reservations are brought to light can result in hidden, residual resentments and resistance that surface in unpredictable ways to impede the innovation's progress.
3. Finally, there must be safeguards against having a minority of people be bullied by a larger group; some redress mechanism must be in place if a new system has a profoundly negative effect on one, small group in the school.

A School Example of Consensus.

In one district, agreement was sought first on a broad statement of human rights for the middle level school. This statement outlined the rights and responsibilities of each person in the school and established a set of core values for the discipline program. Once these were endorsed by teachers, parents and students, a task force went to work on a discipline code and plan for the school. By making sure that the task force contained parents, teachers, students and administrators, the school was certain the plan would be widely accepted by everyone. By putting extra effort into getting agreement at the outset, the school was able to move toward a

discipline system that enjoyed wide support in the community.

HUMAN RIGHTS

These rights apply to all persons -- students and staff -- and to the entire school day, including travel to and from school.

- 1. The right to develop one's own personality (so long as it does not interfere with the rights of others) without disrespectful criticism or pressure from cliques.**
- 2. Freedom from physical abuse and mental abuse such as name calling, intimidation, or harassment.**
- 3. Freedom from being set apart or mocked because of race, sex, religion, physical strength, size, features, friendship groups, age, culture, handicap, financial status, clothing, classroom performance, or any other reason.**
- 4. The right of privacy and freedom from being harassed in the classroom; the right to be treated respectfully.**
- 5. The right to an education, which means that teachers are free to teach and students are free to learn without being interrupted by inconsiderate or unruly students.**
- 6. The right to have personal and school property respected. Our school community is a safe place for property as well as people.**

(From Robert St. Clair, retired Principal, and Terry Wolfson, Principal, Hopkins West Junior High School, Hopkins, Minnesota. Click here to visit their site. <http://www.hopkins.k12.mn.us/pages/west/default.html>)

Throughout this entire process, the group's efforts were supported by providing time, materials, consultants and support staff as necessary. Although virtually everyone in the school agreed with the final outcome, individuals who simply could not live with the group's decisions were permitted to opt into other types of assignments as they became available.

All of this describes a process that allows a group to negotiate a new set of norms for their own behavior. Consensus building produces changes that are relatively permanent because of the continuous negotiation that takes place among members of the group. At its best, this is the most potent form of attitude change strategy for innovation and school change.

Conclusions

Paying careful attention to the ways in which people form beliefs and attitudes will help in virtually any school change effort. Both individual and group attitudes can be influenced very effectively. To improve student behavior and discipline, it is often enough to modify the attitude of individual students. To create a school-wide climate that supports productive student behavior, it may be necessary to change the attitudes of both teachers and students toward such issues as what constitutes normal behavior for adolescents, the role of punishment, and school civility and decorum. In the sections that follow, specific instructions are given for launching just such an attitude change plan.

For Additional Reading on Attitudes and Attitude Change

Bem, Daryl J. (1970). *Beliefs, Attitudes and Human Affairs*. Belmont, CA: Brooks-Cole Publishing Co.

Schein, Edgar H. (1987). *Process Consultation, Volume 2*. Boston: Addison-Wesley.

Schmuck, R. A. and Runkel, P. J. (1994) *The Handbook of Organizational Development in Schools*, 3rd ed., Prospect Heights, IL: Waveland Press.

Zimbardo, Phillip G. (1977). *Influencing Attitudes and Changing Behavior*. Reading, MA: Addison-Wesley.

All available from <http://www.amazon.com>

Developing an Attitude Change Plan

Below you will find a sample attitude change plan developed in a school that was trying to change student attitudes toward arriving at school and class on time. Notice how the school established very clear attitude objectives, then built strategies to achieve those objectives. Also note that a combination of change strategies, as illustrated here, is more effective than a single approach.

To develop an attitude change plan, follow these steps:

1. **Clearly identify the attitude object.** The clearer, the better. Instead of "student attitude toward attendance," be explicit. Say: "student attitudes toward arriving at school on time; arriving at class on time; attending school every day."
2. **Identify the target group.** For whom is the attitude change program developed? Again, be specific. It's better to say "seventh grade students on team B" than "students."
4. **Identify the attitude objective.** List the attitudes you wish the target group to exhibit. Use the "[taxonomy of attitude objectives](#)" as a guideline. For a full text version of this taxonomy, click here: <http://www.humboldt.edu/~tha1/bloomtax.html>
4. **Identify the current status of the group's attitude.** Using instruments or observations, characterize the current attitude of the group toward the attitude object. What evidence do you have?
4. **Develop strategies in each category: behavioral, cognitive, social.** Combined approaches work best, so identify strategies from each area for each objective.

A Sample Attitude Change Plan

Attitude Object: Attendance at school and class.

Objectives:

- Students will attend school regularly. Reduce absentee rate to less than 6% of student body each day, the district average.
- Students will arrive at school on time. Reduce tardy rate to 2%, the district average.
- Students will arrive at class on time. Reduce unexcused classroom tardy rate to 2%.
- Teachers will monitor attendance in each class each day and report on absences and tardies.

Current Status: Approximately 16% of students are absent for a portion of each day. An additional 6-8% are tardy each day. (Source: school attendance records.) Attendance at class is generally high (over 95% of students in the building attend all classes each day), but tardies range from less than 1% to more than 20% depending upon the class, subject and teacher. (Source: teacher attendance records, month of October.) Eighty percent of absences and tardies are attributed to 22% of the student body.

Target Groups:

- (1) Students who are habitually absent and tardy (22%).
- (2) Teachers who are not monitoring student attendance.
- (3) Students who are tardy/absent more than 5 times in a marking period.

Other Conditions: Approximately 1% of tardies are due to late busses each day. First class period tardies are highest because of late arrival at school. Teacher monitoring and reporting of attendance and is sporadic; some teachers do it all the time, some do it some of the time, some seldom do it. Teams in which teachers monitor hallways between classes have lower tardy rates. Tardy rates are generally lower in EnCore classes (technology, art, music) than in Core classes (English, Math, Social Studies, Science). The highest tardy rate is in P.E.

The Plan

Goal	Cognitive Strategies	Behavioral Strategies	Social Strategies	Organizational Strategies
<p>1.1 Students will attend school regularly</p> <p>1.2 Students will arrive at school on time.</p>	<p>1. Teachers explain to classes how attendance affects grades.</p> <p>2. Poster campaign in school addressing school and class attendance.</p> <p>3. Morning show contest which requires students to hear entire show for clues.</p>	<p>1. Reward system: individual and group. Individuals earn privileges by attendance points. Teams earn privileges by the point accumulation of team members.</p> <p>2. Aversives: Parents are called any time a habitually absent student is not in school or is late.</p>	<p>1. Buddy system created in which friends earn points by helping each other get to school and class on time.</p>	<p>1. Set up attendance monitoring system so parents can be called if student is absent.</p> <p>2. Design reward system for buddy program and for individual/team attendance program.</p> <p>3. Design morning show contest.</p>
<p>2.1 Students will arrive at class on time.</p>	<p>1. Teachers explain attendance policy for class and how it affects grade.</p> <p>2. Students asked to talk about times in or out of school when being late created a serious problem for them.</p>	<p>1. Teachers monitor student attendance and implement reward system for on-time arrival.</p> <p>2. Teachers use do now activities at beginning of class which add points to grade.</p> <p>3. Teachers monitor hallways during class passing to encourage stragglers.</p>	<p>1. Buddy system used to help students get to class on time.</p> <p>2. Students give tips on how to get to class on time (e.g., use of locker, routes through the building).</p>	<p>1. Place teams in one area of building to reduce class-passing distance.</p> <p>2. Analyze tardies to see if students coming from one area of building are late.</p> <p>3. Alter schedule with 3 minute and 6 minute passing times to allow for locker stops.</p>
<p>3.1 Teachers monitor and</p>	<p>1. Present evidence of</p>	<p>1. Establish reward for teams</p>	<p>1. Showcase practices used</p>	<p>1. Create team reward system.</p>

report student attendance.	effects of monitoring on student attendance.	with best overall attendance, lowest tardy rates, or most improvement.	by effective teachers in reducing tardies.	2. Develop <i>attendance news</i> to showcase best practices and tips...and to remind teachers of importance.
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Tool Kit

A Step by Step Guide for Analyzing and Planning for Attitude Change

This section describes a step-by-step planning process to change attitudes in the school. The examples are taken from the sample attitude change plan described in the previous section.

Important Note: *Although it is best to use a task force to work on the details of an attitude change plan, in the early stages, as many staff as possible should be involved to get the most buy-in for the idea and the objective.*

Step One: Setting the Goal(s)

What is the attitude object? The topic, idea, object, person, event that is the focus of the change program. (In the previous example, it is student attendance at school and class.)

What is the desired attitude: Under ideal circumstances, what would be the attitude you wish students or teachers to have? (Example: (1) Students believe attendance is important, so they come to school and class on time. (2) Teachers believe student attendance is important enough to monitor closely and take specific action to improve it.)

Who is the target audience? Whose attitudes are you trying to change? Why them? (Middle grades students and teachers. Student attitude is related to their attendance. Teachers are crucial in monitoring and implementing programs to improve attendance.)

What does success look like? Identify someone who has the desired attitude. (Students: Mary Smith, Tawana Jenkins, Roberto Cruz, Susan Chan, Ravi Gupta. Teachers: Carolyn Boyd, Lorenzo Johnson, Tom Lojudice, Robyn Garcia.)

What evidence does they give of that attitude? (Students: Arrive on time for school and class. Attend school daily; minimal absences. Plan for school to minimize delays. Plan for school day to reduce need to return to locker. Carry necessary materials or store in classroom. Teachers: Organize classroom for efficiency (e.g., daily routines, monitoring of individual behavior). Begin class with engaging activity. Monitor hallways outside of classroom. Reward regular attendance. Comment frequently on importance of attendance. Contact parents if attendance is a problem.)

At this point, it is useful to select a task force to work on the specific attitude change plan. This group must be sure to stay in touch with the entire staff and involve them in the work through interviews, surveys and informational meetings.

Step Two: Defining the Current Situation.

In this stage, the task force, working with the rest of the school, seeks to identify the current status of the school related to the attitude object. They may use surveys, interviews or focus groups as sources of information. It is best not to rely on “hunches” or “everyone knows” generalizations, since important information can be easily overlooked.

What is the current attitude toward attendance? What is the prevailing belief among students and teachers about student attendance? (In the earlier example, it is clearly mixed. A rather small portion of the students accounts for most attendance and tardies. Teacher behavior to improve attendance is mixed.)

What evidence do you have of this attitude? What sources of information about the attitude are at your disposal? Do you have behavioral data? Have you interviewed students, teachers, and parents? Can you survey them for their opinions? (From the earlier example, evidence came from attendance records that were analyzed by class period, student, teacher, team and subject area.)

Step Three: Identifying the Source of the Existing Attitudes

This is the step when listening is very important, particularly to people who may not agree with the prevailing opinion. The task force is seeking to find out exactly why people hold and express the attitudes they have.

What *behavioral* conditions exist? Are there conditions in the school which force people to behave in certain ways? (Do students have enough time to get from class to class? Are certain teachers holding students late? Do teachers have to move from class to class so they cannot monitor their area? Are teams spread out, forcing large groups of students to travel long distances?)

What *universal aversives* are shaping attitudes (pain, fear/anxiety, frustration, humiliation/embarrassment, boredom, and physical discomfort)? Are there punishments for coming to school or to class on time? If students arrive at school early, are they simply penned up until the bell rings? Are they forced to remain outside in inclement weather? Are they kept away from their lockers or friends? Are they deprived of the chance to use the time to plan for the day? If they come to class early, are they rewarded in some way? Are the early minutes of class important? Engaging?

What *positive consequences* are shaping attitudes? Are there rewards for being late? Is it the only unstructured time available for interaction with friends? Is there an absence of negative consequences for being late; do teachers simply ignore it? Do I get to spend extra time doing something I like and avoid boring or irrelevant instruction? (In many cases, there are simply no positive consequences for doing the right thing.)

What social conditions exist which may be causing the current attitude? Are social

conditions in the school shaping the attitude and behavior of students and teachers in negative ways? Are undesirable attitudes being modeled? If so, by whom? Are any positive models provided?

Who is modeling the desired attitude? Are any students and teachers modeling the desired attitude? If so, how are they doing it? Are they attractive models that represent the diversity in the school or are they the nerds, or grinds or dorks?

Who is modeling undesired attitude? Which students and teachers are modeling the undesirable attitude? How are they doing it? Are they attractive models to other students and faculty? If so, why? Why are they modeling the undesirable attitude? It may be that certain, powerful people are modeling the undesired attitude, and there is no countervailing model of the positive attitude. It is important to know who the opinion makers are in every school.

Who has been rewarded? Have those with the desirable attitude been rewarded? Is the reward truly a reward and not a punishment? How have they been rewarded? By whom? Desirable attitudes are more likely to be repeated and shape behavior if they are rewarded. What tangible rewards are provided for those who have a positive attitude?

Who has more status? Do the people modeling the desirable or undesirable attitude have more status in the school? Why? How did they get that status? If high status people model undesirable attitudes, it is very hard to change the group attitude.

Who has been punished? Has anyone been punished for expressing the desired attitude? In many cases, doing the right thing results in more work, more difficulty, or more responsibility. To others, it looks as if the person who is doing the right thing is punished rather than rewarded. How have people been punished? Why were they punished?

What cognitive forces may be shaping the current attitude? Certain attitudes prevail because, given the information people have, they are quite logical. Assessing the logic of certain attitudes is a step toward changing them.

What does (the group) believe about the attitude object? Has the group ever been asked to think about their attitudes toward the topic? What do they believe about it? Do they believe that attendance is important? If not, that belief needs to be changed before any meaningful progress can be made.

Are there logical inconsistencies between what the group believes and the way they behave?

Do group members have contradictory beliefs about the attitude object? If so, what are they? Are they aware of them? What will bring them to the group's attention? If teachers believe attendance is important, but do nothing to monitor or improve it, that is a glaring inconsistency. Once it has been identified, it can be discussed by the group with the intention of making their behavior consistent with their belief.

What would convince the group to change their attitude in a desired direction? What kind of information or presentation might help the group understand the importance of student

attendance? A testimonial from successful high school students? Data on the relationship between grades and attendance in their own school? What kind of information is likely to stimulate thinking among students and teachers about the importance of attendance?

Step Four: Planning for Change

In this step, the task force lays out a broadly based plan to change the attitude and shares it with the rest of the faculty.

How can we change the conditions that are producing undesirable attitudes and behaviors?

Check the conditions identified in step three. Which of those conditions are under the control of the school and which are not? How can we change the ones we can control and minimize the effects of the ones we cannot control?

How can I remove universal aversives to the new attitude or behavior? What can we do to stop punishing people for doing the right thing? Can we let students enter the building early so they can spend time with their friends? Can we give them access to homerooms or other informal gathering places so they find it comfortable to be in school? Can we train teachers to begin classes with interesting and engaging activity in order to reduce boredom?

How can I arrange positive consequences for the new attitude or behavior? How can we reward the desirable attitude or behavior? Can we provide snacks for students who arrive at school early? Can we run a reward and incentive program to encourage on-time arrival and good attendance? What can teachers do to reward on-time attendance instead of simply punishing tardiness?

Can we control the social forces in the school to produce positive outcomes? To what extent can we create social reinforcements for the desired attitude? How can we assure that students and teachers who do the right things get positive social rewards?

How can I change the model's attitude to be more positive? What can I do to change the attitude or behavior of those who are modeling the undesirable attitude? If I can't get them to model the desirable attitude, can I at least get them to stop modeling the negative one?

How can I strengthen or introduce a new model? Is there a way to bringing more positive attention to someone who is modeling the desired attitude? Are there other attractive individuals who can model the new attitude? Who are the heroes for the students and teachers? Will they express and reinforce the new attitude?

How can I avoid rewarding the negative model? Are we inadvertently rewarding the negative model by giving increased public attention or in some other way? If so, how can we stop doing it?

How can I avoid punishing (and reward) the positive model? What specific rewards and reinforcements can we give to those people who are modeling the desired attitude? How can we

be sure they are not punished by additional work or ostracism by their peers and colleagues.

What is standing in the way of group consensus on this attitude? What is keeping the group from agreeing that this new attitude is desirable? Can we remove those impediments? If so, how? If not, can we minimize them?

How can I achieve consensus? On what can we achieve consensus? If we cannot achieve consensus on a new discipline plan, can we agree on some basic values we want to see in the school? Can we agree that all discipline should be consistent with those values?

How can we use information or other cognitive strategies to change attitudes? Is there a way of using information or persuasive communication to strengthen the new attitude or to get people to question the old attitude?

What kind of persuasive communication can I use to change attitudes? Is there an attractive advocate, perhaps a veteran teacher, who can be an articulate spokesperson for a new attitude? How can we assure him or her an audience? What kind of information would be most persuasive to this group?

What kind of cognitive dissonance can I create to change attitudes? What are the discrepancies between what we believe and what we do? How can we arrange for a full discussion of these discrepancies and how to reduce them? Do we need an outside facilitator for this process or can we manage it ourselves?

Step Five: Put your plan into action.

This is the point at which the task force, with the rest of the faculty, students and administration, make the plan happen. This step works best when the task force has been meticulous in including everyone along each step of the way.

Where do the attitude change strategies come from? As a result of the planning process, there should be plenty of suggestions for action steps. In the sample plan for student attendance, the action steps became clear as the analysis of the problem moved along. In the case of attitude change plans, the strategies become obvious as the nature of the problem is more clearly understood. Even so, it is useful to have some strategies in mind. Many can be found in the references listed at the end of the Handbook or by contacting the individuals in the Resources section of this module.

Are there any guidelines for all attitude change plans? All attitude change plans work better if certain principles are used in their design and implementation.

Guidelines for Attitude Change Plans

- Include as many people as possible in the assessment and planning.** Use the ideas and information that comes from teachers and students. They are closest to the problem

and have unique and valuable perspectives on the problem. Ask people why they do certain things that appear baffling to observers. Most of the time, people behave in purposeful ways -- they can tell you why they do what they do. Further, by assuring full participation, we can be more certain that the ultimate plan will be fully implemented by everyone in the school.

- **Provide a safe environment for discussion.** Discussions about attitudes and beliefs can become heated! It is important that major issues be discussed, but that unnecessary conflict not be introduced. It may be useful to use an outside consultant to lead the discussion of very sensitive issues. As a minimum, have □ground rules about the discussions -- no personal attacks, work toward consensus, listen for agreement, etc.
- **Take enough time.** It has been said that attitudes change quickly, but attitude change spreads slowly. Give the process enough time to be successful. Allow people time to think about new information, consider its implications, watch models in action, and consider the rewards and pay off for looking at things in new ways. An old Spanish proverb says, "You must think slowly to move quickly." So it is with attitude change plans.

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