



Do the Right Thing!

By Faisal Hussain, RCM

People want to do the right thing; we as managers just need to make it easier for them. Small changes in the environment and systems can often have significant effect on peoples' behaviour.



We saw this principle in action when, after a suggestion by one of our committee members Catherine Kellett, we decided to provide a small battery recycling facility on every floor in our condominium building. Our condominium already provided recycling stations for batteries, bulbs, electronics and clothing etc. at the ground floor. All it took was to install a very low cost metal mesh jar on the wall by the garbage chute with a distinct sign to highlight its presence. The picture on this page shows the batteries we collected in less than a month. This was probably 10 times more than what we used to collect on the

ground floor. Most of the batteries probably remained in residents' drawers or found their way down the chute.

The 20-second Rule

Shawn Achor, an author and researcher in productivity and positive psychology, describes a "20 second rule" in his book "The Happiness Advantage." He explains that he wanted to make practicing the guitar a daily habit. However, he could not motivate himself to do it in spite of making a daily checklist. His guitar remained in his closet. It probably took around 20 seconds to retrieve the guitar but he could not do it until he took it out of the closet and put it on a stand in his room where it was in front of his eyes and easily accessible.

Sometimes a difference as small as reducing the time by 20 seconds or not having to open a lid can help us do the right thing. I noticed that principle in

action in my personal life as well. I often found myself throwing fruit and vegetable seeds and pits in my regular garbage bin with a motion activated self-opening lid, instead of putting them in the green bin (with a tight lid) located under the kitchen sink. It only took 5 seconds longer. The solution was to have a small, lid-free, transitional container (a professional term for an empty cool whip container) on top of my kitchen counter that is emptied a few times during the day.

So next time I receive a complaint in the property management office about litter lying around the grounds, or a barbecue left uncleaned, I will first think of ways I can make it easier for people to do the right thing. I believe they want to. ■

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