

WHERE ATTENDANCE IMPROVEMENT REQUIRES AN ATTITUDE CHANGE

FROM: **Shaping Beliefs and Attitudes: A Handbook of Attitude Change Strategies.**
 Howard Johnston, University of South Florida
Johnston@tempest.coedu.usf.edu

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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
1.1 Students will attend school regularly	1. Teachers explain to classes how attendance affects grades.	1. Reward system: individual and group. Individuals earn privileges by attendance points. Teams earn privileges by	1. Buddy system created in which friends earn points by helping each other get to school and class on time.	1. Set up attendance monitoring system so parents can be called if student is absent.
1.2 Students will arrive at school on time.	2. Poster campaign in school addressing school			2. Design reward

Goal	Cognitive Strategies	Behavioral Strategies	Social Strategies	Organizational Strategies
	and class attendance. 3. Morning show contest which requires students to hear entire show for clues.	the point accumulation of team members. 2. Aversives: Parents are called any time a habitually absent student is not in school or is late.		system for buddy program and for individual/team attendance program. 3. Design morning show contest.
2.1 Students will arrive at class on time.	1. Teachers explain attendance policy for class and how it affects grade. 2. Students asked to talk about times in or out of school when being late created a serious problem for them.	1. Teachers monitor student attendance and implement reward system for on-time arrival. 2. Teachers use do now activities at beginning of class which add points to grade. 3. Teachers monitor hallways during class passing to encourage stragglers.	1. Buddy system used to help students get to class on time. 2. Students give tips on how to get to class on time (e.g., use of locker, routes through the building).	1. Place teams in one area of building to reduce class-passing distance. 2. Analyze tardies to see if students coming from one area of building are late. 3. Alter schedule with 3 minute and 6 minute passing times to allow for locker stops.
3.1 Teachers monitor and report student attendance.	1. Present evidence of effects of monitoring on student attendance.	1. Establish reward for teams with best overall attendance, lowest tardy rates, or most improvement.	1. Showcase practices used by effective teachers in reducing tardies.	1. Create team reward system. 2. Develop <i>attendance news</i> to showcase best practices and tips...and to remind teachers of importance.

A Tool Kit to Developing an Attitude Change Plan

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 above.

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 Aground 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.