

Sending the Right Signs

Encouraging colleagues to switch lights off, use the correct recycling bin or save water all have positive environmental outcomes, but finding the best way to do it can be a bit daunting. As a green team member or sustainability manager there are lots of tools available to you to encourage positive environmental behaviour, and signs and prompts are some of the most useful ones.

Lots of people want to do the right thing but with everything else that goes on at the workplace it's easy to forget. Even with the best of intentions it's easy to forget to turn off the lights when leaving a meeting room. Talking to colleagues, checking mobile phone messages and packing up notes are all common distractions.

By using signs and prompts you can help colleagues remember and move them in the direction of the desirable action. You can also help create an organisational 'norm' or expectation that supports the positive behaviour you're aiming for - like turning the lights off. There are a few tricks that you can use to make your signs as effective as possible:

Make it noticeable: Make it stand out with bright colours or an eye-catching image. Once a sign has been in the same place for a few weeks people stop noticing it so changing the colour or moving it around a bit will ensure people keep on noticing it.

Make it self-explanatory: If you want people to switch off the lights when they leave a room, make sure that's exactly what the sign says. Something like "Please switch off the lights when you leave the room," is more likely to be effective than one like "Save the planet, turn me off."

Put it as close to the action as possible: If you want people to use the correct recycling bin, put the sign on the lid of the bin, or just above it. You can create an association between the desirable action and the location where it happens.



Recycling bin sticker - noticeable and self-explanatory.

Make it positive: 'Don't' isn't a nice word and most people become resentful being told not to do something. So when ever possible, make your signs positive. Words like "Thanks for turning your computers off at night," is much more likely to be effective than "Don't leave your computers on over night." And because it's a nicer message and makes people feel good about the actions they have undertaken, it increases the likelihood that the actions will be carried out in the future.

Reference

These tips have been adapted from 'Fostering Sustainable Behaviour' by Doug McKenzie-Mohr and William Smith.



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