

## **Increasing Participation Means Changing Behavior: What Can Be Learned From Behavioral Science?**

*Thomas E. Backer, PhD*  
*Human Interaction Research Institute*

It may seem an obvious point, but increasing participation in the arts means that people have to change their *behavior*. The people whose behavior has to change include arts organization staff, artists and people in the community. If we want success over time, then these people have to change their behavior in relatively enduring ways. In these remarks, I'm going to concentrate on people in the community - that is, the audience, or potential audience, or former audience, for the arts.

As a behavioral scientist, I know that if we want to change people's behavior in a strategic way, so that we'll have maximum impact, we have to know four things:

- \* *Whose* behavior do you want to change?
- \* *What* behavior do you want to change?
- \* *How* can you change the behavior?
- \* How will you know you've *succeeded* in changing the behavior?

Modern commercial marketing methods answer these four questions in rather precise ways, and integrate them into coherent strategies through such approaches as relationship marketing, which extends marketing strategy over time, and whole-person marketing, which extends the marketing relationship over a variety of products and services people can buy. However, all too often in marketing for nonprofit arts, the answers aren't so precise or so well-integrated.

We want people to buy more tickets, but what kinds of behavior by what types of people really has to change in order for more tickets to be sold? A simple example comes from the recent study of California arts consumers by AMS Research, showing that 54% of respondents were more likely to accept someone else's invitation than they were to initiate an arts experience on their own. To increase ticket sales, you have to know this, and you have to know just who are the "influential minority" doing the inviting, and what circumstances motivate them to invite.

Once you know whose behavior you want to change in what ways, the next step is to devise a strategy for doing so. Often arts organizations apply a methodology they've heard has worked in some other venue - a cocktail hour for young professionals, an earlier curtain time for performances - without really understanding either what behavior is being changed or how it is happening.

Finally, you also need to know if the strategy for behavior change has succeeded. While ticket sales or attendance figures are one valid way to do that, if you are trying to change behavior in enduring ways you need to know more. Are people thinking differently and are they behaving differently in ways that will last? So, what does behavioral science have to say about all this?

I want you to imagine a cabal of psychologists, gathered for days in a darkened room in which they debate endlessly about what principles have been learned from scientific research and theory about how to change behavior. After much yelling and screaming, and the tossing about of many theoretical principles, academic credentials and well-worn psychology textbooks, the cabal comes up with eight principles that represent the "state of the science." Like medieval alchemy, more than 100 years of behavioral science research has been magically distilled down into eight principles about how to change behavior.

While I'm exaggerating about the cabal, the darkened room, and maybe a little about the endless debate and yelling and screaming, what I'm describing actually happened in 1992, when some of the most famous psychologists in the world, people whose works I've been reading since I was a freshman psychology student in 1966, gathered under the auspices of the National Institute of Mental Health for the "Theorist's Workshop," as it was called, from which they did indeed come up with eight principles for behavior change that come from thousands of behavioral science studies.

These principles have since been used in a great variety of circumstances to help us design strategies for behavior change, especially in the health fields for work on problems like preventing HIV infection. I worked with one of the behavioral scientists, Dr. Martin Fishbein of the University of Pennsylvania, in the mid-1990's to apply these principles to the field of drug abuse, and with some other scientists we wrote a book on this subject, published by the National Institute on Drug Abuse.

I'd now like to share these principles with you, and give you a few thoughts about how these might be applied to cultural participation strategies in the arts. My hope is that hearing the principles will inspire you, who run, help or fund arts organizations and communities, to create more focused strategies for using such principles to promote change in audience behavior. Applying them in the context of the four critical questions I just asked also will increase the chances that your cultural participation strategies will work, and keep on working over time.

For those of you with a background in psychology, these principles were derived from four theories about behavior change - Bandura's Social Cognitive Theory, Fishbein's Theory of Reasoned Action, Kanfer's Theory of Self-Regulation and Self-Control, and Triandis's Theory of Subjective Culture and Interpersonal Relations. These principles suggest that you are more likely to get behavior change if:

- 1 - the person forms a strong positive intention, or makes a commitment, to perform the behavior**
- 2 - there are no environmental constraints that make it impossible for the behavior to occur**
- 3 - the person possesses the skills necessary to perform the behavior**
- 4 - the person perceives that the advantages of performing the behavior outweigh the disadvantages**

**5 - the person perceives more normative pressure to perform the behavior than not to perform it**

**6 - the person believes that performance of the behavior is more consistent than inconsistent with his or her self-image or that it does not violate personal standards**

**7 - the person's emotional reaction to performing the behavior is more positive than negative**

**8 - the person perceives that he or she has the ability to perform the behavior under a number of different circumstances**

Since the purpose of sharing these principles with you is to promote brainstorming and discussion, I'll only give a few examples and clarifications at this point. The principle of intention is used by telemarketers and other salespeople all the time - if you can get people to verbalize being interested, then they feel pressure to actually go ahead and buy.

An interesting twist on this has to do with social embarrassment; it turns out that in dealing with behavior changes like stopping smoking or losing weight, one of the most powerful effects comes from expressing your intention to someone you respect or who you regard as an authority figure, and it's even stronger if you make out a check to the cause you hate the most and give it to a friend who'll send the check if you don't keep your commitment! I'll leave it to you to figure out how this might apply to cultural participation.

Environmental constraints of course have been the subject of many arts marketing studies - in Charlotte, North Carolina, just as one example, the arts rebounded when people began to see downtown as safe at night again. If the skill involved is actually understanding the arts experience one is having, supertitles may have done more to change people's behavior about opera-going than any other development in recent years. Again, you can think of many ways to apply these principles.

Any arts experience has disadvantages, such as financial and time costs. And most people participate in the arts partly because of normative pressures from groups or communities they're part of - if you're a member of Old Guard society, going to the symphony and opera is part of your expected social life, for example. No surprises here, either.

Self-image and personal standards are particularly important elements driving cultural participation behavior when the artistic material is controversial - nudity or sexual content, for instance. And as Jerry Zaltman's studies of metaphor in arts makes clear, there are deep feeling and meaning components to arts experiences, often beyond what we can easily put in words. Finally, behavior that persists is not seen as just a fluke in the eyes of the person performing the behavior - and the easiest evidence for that is being able to perform the behavior under different circumstances, such as going to several different types of performances at a downtown music center.

Our cabal of psychologists had one more thing to say about these eight principles: they work best when combined together as a kind of "checklist for action" in going about the complicated process of behavior change, and the relative importance of the principles varies depending upon the population or type of behavior in question. These principles come from theory and research, but using them together starts to move them towards pragmatic application in the real world.

Kurt Lewin, the great social psychologist, once said "there's nothing so practical as a good theory." Like creating a unique work of art these eight principles for behavior change can be combined together in a strategic way to fit each unique cultural participation objective we might undertake in each unique arts organization or community.

In truth, there's nothing either new or terribly complicated about them, despite their having come from very sophisticated behavioral science research. The point of presenting them here is to stimulate thinking about them more strategically - that is, looking at all eight rather than just one or two at a time; and to think about them more precisely, using the four questions I mentioned earlier. What isn't new is still sometimes quite valuable when looked at in a new way, or to quote the great American actress Helen Hayes, "It's what you learn after you know it all that really counts."

### **Reference**

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