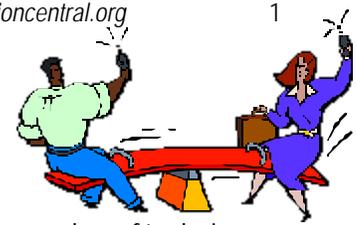


## Motivating the 'Reluctant' Teacher: Six Strategies for Pre-Referral Intervention Teams



Schools are complex social organizations. Researchers have discovered a number of techniques that can be used in social settings, including schools, to increase people's motivation to express support for a process or carry out an action. Presented here are six key strategies (*reciprocation, consistency, social proof, liking, authority, scarcity*) for building social influence (Cialdini, 1984). Pre-referral intervention teams might consider using one or more of them when attempting to energize 'reluctant teachers' to make full use of the team's services. Of course, as with all techniques designed to impact social influence, these approaches should be used in an ethical and responsible manner.

**Reciprocation.** When people are given a gift or have a service performed for them, they feel obligated to 'pay back' that gift or service. Often, the person who initiates the favor is in a position both to select what is given and to suggest an appropriate 'pay-back' favor. The impulse to reciprocate can also be triggered through the 3-step 'rejection-then-retreat' strategy: (1) One party makes a request that is within reason but also goes beyond what the second party can agree to. So the request is rejected. (2) The first party then retreats to a *milder* request (concession). (3) The second party now feels obligated to match the requester's initial concession with a reciprocal concession. So he or she is likely to accept this less ambitious request.

Here are some ideas for how pre-referral intervention teams can use **reciprocation** to energize teachers:

- Regularly stuff teacher mailboxes with intervention tips, along with a cover note inviting their referrals to the intervention team.
- Sponsor teacher workshops on common academic or behavioral concerns (with attractive handouts, refreshments, etc.). During the workshop, invite teachers to refer to your team.
- Offer to meet with a teacher for an intervention-team meeting at a time most convenient to him or her, even if this accommodation is somewhat *inconvenient* for team members.
- Offer to collect baseline information on a problem student and to schedule a brief conference with the teacher to discuss findings (e.g., percentage of time on task). At the conference, invite the teacher to refer the student to the intervention team.
- Canvass intervention-team members to compile a list of 'special services' they might offer to a struggling teacher. (E.g., a physical education teacher might offer to give high-energy kids an extra gym period twice per week, etc.). Approach that teacher with the list of intervention team services and invite him or her to select 1 or 2. After delivery of the service(s), invite the teacher to refer a student to the team.

**Consistency.** People strive, often unconsciously, to maintain consistency between their opinions or attitudes and their actions.

The 'foot-in-the-door' technique uses our need for internal consistency as an incremental motivational tool to get people to agree to a request that they would otherwise probably refuse. (1) First, the person is asked to perform a small act that signals support for a cause (e.g., signing a petition to keep our highways free from litter). (2) As a direct result of agreeing to that small act, the person realigns his or her internal attitudes to match the action (e.g., 'I am a person that will take action to support the cause of a litter-free environment.'). (3) The person will then be more

likely in the future to say 'yes' to *larger* requests that support the same cause (e.g., agreeing to join a weekend cleanup group that volunteers time to clear trash from alongside scenic roadways).

The power of consistency between words and acts can be made even greater when the person's initial, small act supporting a cause is publicized for others (e.g., publishing the names of those signing an anti-litter petition in a local newspaper).

Here are some ideas for how intervention teams can use **consistency** to energize teachers:

- Invite a 'reluctant teacher' to provide 'moral support' to a colleague by accompanying him or her to an intervention-team meeting. Once the teacher has participated in the intervention team problem-solving process as a guest, follow up with an invitation to that teacher to submit his or her own student referral to the team.
- Approach 'reluctant teachers' who have specialized training or skills (e.g., in early literacy) to serve as 'consultant members' of the intervention team. Invite them to meetings whenever their expertise is needed. Spread the word through the school that these teachers are serving as team members. Eventually, invite them to refer one of their own students to the intervention team.
- Ask a teacher if he or she would keep a supply of intervention team referral forms or other materials in the classroom for the convenience of colleagues. If the teacher agrees, approach him or her several weeks later about referring a student to the team.
- Organize a team -sponsored monthly school contest, in which teachers and other school staff are invited to submit academic or behavioral 'intervention tips'. Publicize the winners' names and distribute their strategies to all teachers on intervention-team letterhead. Later, invite winners to join the intervention team or to refer students to the team.

**Social Proof.** People are influenced to take an action when they see that others are also doing it. Social proof influences us even more when we believe that those whom we observe doing the activity resemble us (e.g., in occupation, social class, etc.).

Here are some ideas for how intervention teams can use **social proof** to energize teachers:

- Have teachers of varying backgrounds and seniority give occasional testimonials at faculty meetings about the success of the intervention team's problem-solving process.
- If your school has a grade level (e.g., middle school) that sends few referrals to the intervention team, invite a teacher from that grade level to join the team.
- Ask a teacher from an underrepresented grade level who had a successful intervention team case for permission to publicize the main points of the intervention plan with other faculty from her or his teaching team or grade who might want to try it with their own students.
- Identify key qualities of selected 'reluctant teacher' groups (e.g., veteran teachers, middle-school faculty). Bring in a small delegation of intervention-team members and referring teachers from a *different* school to talk about their successes at a faculty meeting. Be sure that some of those speakers are teachers with characteristics similar to those of reluctant teachers from your own school.
- Collect general statistics about teachers' use of your intervention team and share those statistics with staff. For example, an intervention team might announce, "we received 35 separate referrals last year from 20 teachers. That means that nearly half of our classroom instructors used our intervention team. This year we want to see the number of teachers referring to our team to go even higher!"

**Liking.** People are motivated to carry out the requests of those whom they like. Friends are obviously the most persuasive, because we have already chosen to like them! If friends are not available, we typically find people whom we are familiar with (neutral acquaintances) to be more likeable than complete strangers.

A person unknown to us can increase his or her likeability by having a connection to one of our friends, complimenting us, or appearing similar to us (e.g., engaging in the same hobbies or interests or sharing similar attitudes or opinions).

Here are some ideas for how intervention teams can use **liking** to energize teachers:

- Ask referring teachers who had a good experience with your intervention team if they would be willing to encourage a colleague whom they are friends with to refer a student to the team.
- List groups or individuals in the building that currently are not using your intervention team very much. Assign the member of your team who has the most positive relationship with each group or individual on the list to seek them out to invite them personally to refer a student to the team.
- Whenever possible, strongly encourage teachers referring a student to the intervention team to bring a colleague of their choice to the meeting for 'collegial support'. As friends of the referring teacher, these invited guests will themselves probably be open to a later invitation to refer a student to the team.
- At intervention-team meetings, compliment referring teachers on positive aspects of their instruction or behavior management. Keep praise brief, sincere, and specific.
- Sign up well-liked faculty to serve on the intervention team. (You can quickly generate a list of respected faculty by having your staff nominate intervention-team members through an anonymous survey.)

**Authority.** People respect and follow authority. There are a number of types of authority that can motivate us. Examples of authority include organizational (e.g., school principal), experiential (e.g., veteran teachers), and professional (e.g., teacher with an advanced degree or specialized training).

Here are some ideas for how intervention teams can use **authority** to energize teachers:

- Have your principal set a goal for each non-tenured new teacher to refer at least *one* student to the intervention team that year.
- Have higher-level building or district administrators make supportive comments about the your team at faculty meetings or workshops.
- Ask teachers with experiential or professional authority to give public testimonials about the value of the intervention team.
- Send individual 'Thank You' cards to teachers who refer to the intervention team. Have your principal sign each card personally.
- If a respected speaker or presenter from outside your school comes in to present to faculty, consider approaching that person in advance to describe the intervention-team process and to request that the speaker make public, supportive statements about the project.

**Scarcity.** When items, resources or opportunities are in short supply, people value them more. We become even *more* motivated when we have to compete *with others* for scarce resources!

Here are some ideas for how intervention teams can use **scarcity** to energize teachers:

- Plan a moratorium (end-date) for accepting referrals to your school's intervention team. Publicize this date as it approaches.
- Set a cap on the number of referrals that your team will accept during a school year. Post this number publicly. As new referrals are accepted, change the posted number to reflect the quantity of 'open' referral slots still available. Announce this figure regularly at faculty meetings or in the school newsletter.
- Teachers feel the pressure of low-performing students more acutely at predictable milestones in the school year (e.g., end of marking periods, around the time of state 'checkpoint' examinations). As these dates approach, send a supportive note to faculty from your team reminding them that the team is still accepting referrals but that slots are limited.
- Create an attractive packet of desirable intervention strategies or tips. Print off only enough copies of the packet so that teachers referring to your team can each receive a copy. As the supply of handouts dwindles, remind teachers that they can still get their copy by referring a student to the intervention team.
- Enlist a building staff member with specialized behavior-management or instructional knowledge as a 'consultant member' of the intervention team. Announce to staff that this team consultant has agreed to participate in only a limited number of cases (e.g., five slots)—and that your team will honor teacher requests for these select meeting slots on a first-come, first-serve basis.

#### Reference

Cialdini, R.B. (1984). *Influence: How and why people agree to things*. New York: William Morrow & Company, Inc.