

Nudging Your Leaders:

Overcome The Knowing-Doing Gap
and Increase Engagement,
One Little Nudge At A Time



LEADx

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Foreword	2
What the heck is a 'nudge' anyway?	3
From flies to fries and 401Ks to calories	4
Is it a nudge or a nag?	5
Crafting your behavioral nudge strategy	6
Creating and sending nudges that work	7
Want 'Coach Amanda' to nudge your leaders?	8
About the author	8

FOREWORD

“If only they would do what we trained them to do,” sighed Allison, an HR professional who I met at a recent leadership development conference. This is, of course, a sentiment shared by many.

In most organizations, *training* managers isn’t the problem. We provide training on management fundamentals, leading with strengths, communication styles and so much more.

Yet, nothing changes. And engagement scores remain the same. Why?

It’s been called the “Knowing-Doing Gap”—the massive chasm between what we *know* and what we *actually* apply back on the job.

There are many systemic causes for The Gap: flawed reward systems, competing priorities, short-term goals, and more. But other causes are more simple. Like, we’re all so crazy busy. We know what we’re supposed to do but forget about it in our daily grind. Do you know Pat?

Pat is a front-line manager who *wants* to be a great leader. Pat *cares* about team engagement scores. Pat *knows* that recognition drives engagement.

But day-to-day, Pat is “crazy busy” rushing from one meeting to the next, focused on tasks, and spreadsheets. Pat forgets to catch people doing great work, or doesn’t think there is the time.

But imagine if there was a tiny executive coach sitting on Pat’s shoulder throughout the day. (*OK, that’s weird, I know.*) And every now and then the coach whispers something like,

Psst! Hey, Pat. At your next weekly status meeting, try kicking it off by recognizing someone who did something great recently. It’s a good habit to get into.

That little reminder is an example of a behavioral *nudge*. And nudges can make a dramatic difference in human behavior, and can substantially close the Knowing-Doing Gap.

Thank you for the work you do; I hope this white paper is helpful on your journey creating great leaders for the future.

Kevin Kruse
Founder + CEO, LEADx
New York Times bestselling author

Before we give you the mind-numbing official definition of a behavioral nudge, let's offer our own plain language definition:

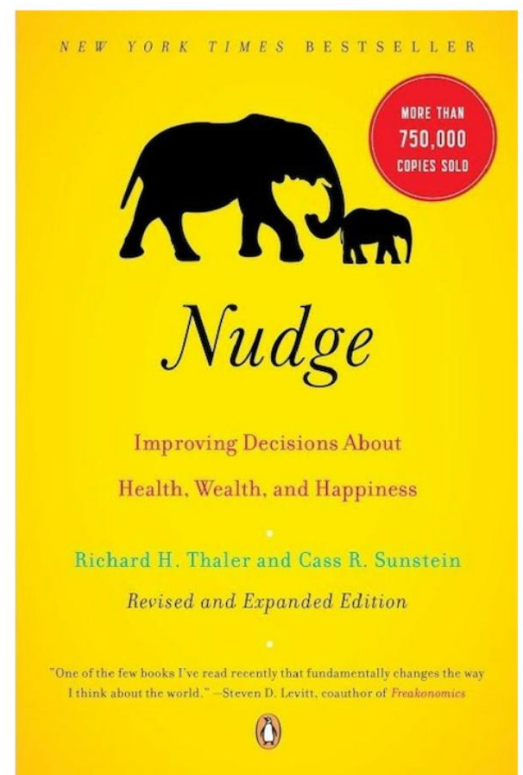
A nudge is an indirect suggestion or subtle reminder intended to influence people's behavior.

Officially, the term “nudge” was defined and popularized by two huge professors of economics, Richard Thaler and Cass Sunstein. In their 2009 book, *Nudge: Improving Decisions About Health, Wealth, and Happiness*, they define a nudge as:

A nudge, as we will use the term, is any aspect of the choice architecture that alters people's behavior in a predictable way without forbidding any options or significantly changing their economic incentives. To count as a mere nudge, the intervention must be easy and cheap to avoid. Nudges are not mandates. Putting fruit at eye level counts as a nudge. Banning junk food does not.

Practically speaking, nudges can take the form of a sign posted in a public place, a message sent in the mail or digitally, or even just in the design of a process, or placement of objects that are intended to result in positive choices.

The power of nudges to positively influence behavior has proven to be so great that large companies, the military, and even countries have formed official “nudge units” to craft nudging strategies to accomplish organizational objectives.



Hey, Grant. Your engagement focus area is RECOGNITION. Consider blocking 15 minutes on your calendar this week to jot a few thank you notes.

To understand behavioral nudges, it helps to realize that they are all around you.

- The most famous example of an effective nudge is when workers at an Amsterdam airport etched pictures of flies near the drain in the urinals in the men's bathrooms. Once men had something to focus on--to aim at--"spillage" was reduced by 80%. (Although you kind of have to wonder how they measured that.)
- "Would you like to supersize that?" and "Would you like fries with that?" are two classic nudges used in quick service restaurants around the world.
- Forcing restaurants to list the calories next to items on a menu is intended as a nudge to smaller portions and healthier choices.
- When companies onboard new employees and make the default choice to contribute to both the United Way and the 401K plan, they are nudging your money.
- When your dentist sends you a text message reminding you of an upcoming appointment, you've just been nudged.
- When your smartphone dings at you, you're being nudged to pick it up and check it for new messages. The number in the little red circle is an app nudging you, "Open me! Open me!"
- A sign at a construction site declaring "107 days without an accident", reminds workers to be alert and to work safely--and psychologically, no worker wants to be the one to break the streak.
- The "Smoking Causes Lung Cancer" message on a pack of cigarettes is a nudge not to smoke.
- The power company is sending you a nudge with that letter alerting you that your energy usage is higher than your neighbors.

Remember, Ann, your personality is HIGH in CONSCIENTIOUSNESS. Attention to detail is great. But don't let perfectionism hold you back from delegating work to others.

You may be thinking, “Big deal! We send reminders to our employees all the time. We tell them they have one more day to complete our survey, how to log-in to our learning portal, that they have to pass the final quiz by 80% or better...”

Indeed, those kinds of messages could be considered nudging. But without finesse, they are probably viewed by those who receive them as simple nagging. Professor Sunstein lays out the most important types of nudges in the paper, *Nudging: A Very Short Guide*. They include:

1. Defaults and automatic enrollments. For example, requiring someone to opt-out of being an organ donor when they renew their driver’s license dramatically increases the pool of donors. Examples within the context of leadership development include, automatically enrolling new managers into leadership workshops.

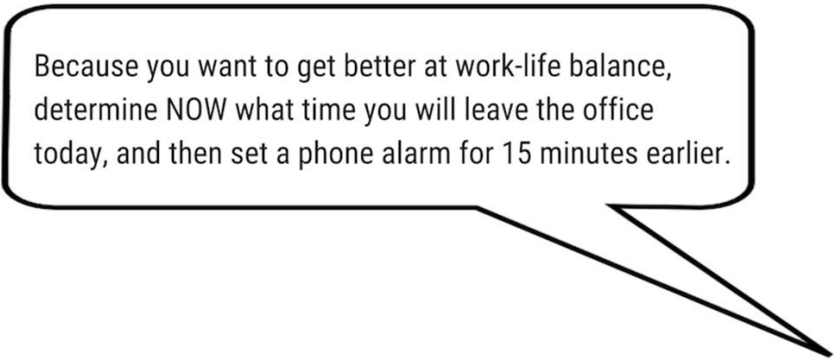
2. Simplification. The “Motor Voter Law” was enacted in the United States to make it easy for people to register to vote when they renewed their driver’s license. Within the context of leadership development, how many clicks and keystrokes does it take for managers to access your online learning material? How easy is it for them to interpret their engagement scores?

3. Social norms. Whether it’s comparing your weight, your energy use, or your voting habits, or something else against “the norm”, social norms is one of the most powerful incentives. Do your managers know how they compare to “average” when it comes to engagement scores, employee retention, or courses completed?

4. Disclosure and Transparency. When we know the negative cost of our actions—or inaction—we are more likely to change. Do you automatically share managers’ employee engagement results with their team members?

5. Precommitment requests. The more specific we are about taking a future action, the more likely we are to follow through. For example, prior to elections when people say they intend to vote, just by having them answer, “What time on election day will you go and vote?” they are far more likely follow-through. Could you ask your managers, “which half hour this week will you devote to professional development?”

6. Reminders. Last but not least, simply reminding people to do something is among the easiest and most powerful of nudges. Could you remind your managers of their unique strengths or personality style and how to lead with it effectively?

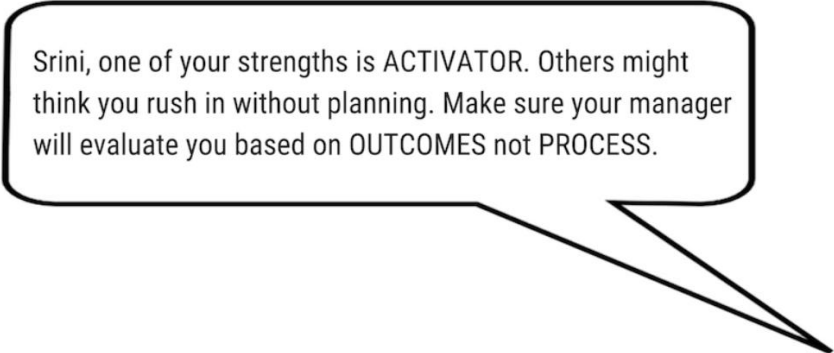


Because you want to get better at work-life balance, determine NOW what time you will leave the office today, and then set a phone alarm for 15 minutes earlier.

If you think tactics from behavioral science may be a good supplement to the training and development programs you are already offering, it's a good idea to start with a written plan.

Your plan doesn't need to be deep on psychology--no need to scare your boss with fancy terminology! Think of it more as a memo or "pitch deck" that can win the support of senior leadership or get peers up to speed. Consider covering the following questions:

- **What is your goal?** What are you trying to achieve? Will your nudge campaign be designed to increase employee engagement driving behaviors? Or perhaps you want to improve your next survey response rate? Do you want more managers to be more consistent with their weekly one-on-one meetings? Or do you want them to use strengths-based coaching?
- **Who is your target audience?** Who should be nudged? All managers? New managers? Managers who have below average engagement scores?
- **What is the message cadence?** Will you send out one nudge a week for 12 weeks? Or one message a day for a month? Or will your messages be triggered by specific events (e.g., the hiring or firing of an employee)? What time of day will you send each message, and why that time?
- **What form will the nudges take?** Will all of the messages be sent via email? Will they display on the company Intranet or internal TV system? Will you use automated voice mail blasts? Signs in the conference room?
- **Who else do you need to coordinate with?** Do you need to explain your program to second-line leaders? To IT? Should the nudges be reviewed by your legal department or HR?
- **How will you measure the impact of the nudge campaign?** Will you survey the nudge recipients? Will you survey their direct reports? Will you use data analysis to look for a correlation between nudge recipients and higher engagement scores or performance reviews?



Srini, one of your strengths is ACTIVATOR. Others might think you rush in without planning. Make sure your manager will evaluate you based on OUTCOMES not PROCESS.

Think about an old-fashioned nudge, a simple sign in the workplace. Whether the sign reads “Please don’t leave your dishes in the sink!” or “The last day to register for open enrollment is Dec 15”, three things need to happen for the nudge to be effective: it has to be noticed, read, and acted upon.

Today, most workplace nudges are sent digitally as email messages, or Slack messages, or some other digital message. But similar to the old-fashioned sign, three things need to happen: the message must be opened, read, and acted upon.

Nudges are never effective 100% of the time, with 100% of the intended audience. But there are specific things you can do to increase the odds that they’ll be opened, read and acted upon.

1. Who is the Sender? The first thing recipients notice about an email or other message, is who sent it. People are far more likely to open a message from a real person than from “DoNotReply@Company.com”. They are more likely to open a message from a known person than a stranger. They are more likely to open a message from your CEO, than from you.

2. Make the Subject line count. The objective of the subject line in an email nudge is to get the recipient *to open the email*. Your subject should be like a headline or title of a great article. Nothing cryptic, nothing vague, and definitely not left blank. Craft subject lines that make the reader curious, or offer a strong benefit, is personalized, or deliver the message in the subject line itself.

3. Keep body content short. OK, you’ve successfully gotten your nudge opened, but will it be read? Remember, we are all crazy busy--that’s why we need nudges in the first place! The last thing you want to do is send a 500-word message. Keep it short. One to three sentences are ideal.

4. Personalize the nudge. Which would you be more likely to act upon? This message, “Don’t forget to work on your engagement behaviors this week!” Or this message, “Alex, your employee engagement focus area is recognition. Tip: schedule 15 minutes on your calendar this week to write out some thank you notes.” The more personal the better.

5. Consider timing. It can be difficult or impractical to figure out the exact best time to send each message to each person. But common sense goes a long way. In general, people would rather receive a nudge early in the day than when they’re rushing out of the office to make it home for dinner. Sending a nudge to sales managers during the annual sales retreat probably won’t be very effective; a reminder to managers in the accounting department during a quarterly close probably won’t be noticed. Consider the hour, the day of the week, and the time in the month that people would be most receptive to being nudged.

LEADx with Coach Amanda is the world's first AI-powered Leadership Acceleration Platform for the modern workforce. LEADx combines behavioral science, artificial intelligence and expert content to dramatically improve leadership behaviors, employee engagement and productivity.

If you would like to learn how LEADx with Coach Amanda could become part of your leadership development program, [schedule a demo](#) with a LEADx specialist now, or for more information visit www.LEADx.org.

About The Author



Kevin Kruse is Founder and CEO of *LEADx*, the first and only AI-powered executive coach and leadership success platform built with IBM Watson.

A successful entrepreneur, Kevin has won both "Inc 500" awards for fast growth and "Best Place to Work" awards for employee culture.

Kevin is also a *Forbes* contributor, and a *New York Times* bestselling author of nine books including *Employee Engagement 2.0*, *Employee Engagement for Everyone* and *We: How To Increase Performance and Profit Through Full Engagement*. Kevin's newest book, *Great Leaders Have No Rules: Contrarian Leadership Principles to Transform Your Team and Business* will launch on April 2, 2019.