



Is it Penny Pinching or Just Good Business?

I couldn't understand why he was so upset. How much money were we actually spending on that electricity anyway? It sure didn't seem like a big deal to me, which is why I always forgot to turn the lights off. I guarantee you that if I had to pay the electric bill, my views would have been much different. Let's take this thought process to our work environment. How many lights are left on, computers not shut down, people using far more cleaning product than the need/should? The list goes on and on. Have you ever tried to curb this behavior? Talk about herding cats. I am here to tell you that while it may seem like a losing battle, it is more than worth the effort to focus on the "penny's" saved by changing behaviors.

I assume I don't need to spend time explaining the importance to your organization of every penny you can raise/save. Given the assumption that we all agree that it is a good thing to save as much money as possible, why don't we put processes in place to stop the waste of money at our agencies. I have found that most places feel this to be a fruitless effort. Agency leaders tell their teams time and time again to not waste resources, yet they don't change their behavior. Just like me with lights in my house, the offenders don't have to pay the bills, so they aren't as motivated to be aware of their actions. The good news is that you don't have to threaten your team with having to pay your agency's bills to get them to comply. In fact, you can turn your team into your allies in stopping wasteful habits.

There are just 3 ingredients to the solution.

- 1) consistent training of new staff/volunteers,
- 2) clear and visible communication and
- 3) focus on the positives.

Consistent training is a staple in many of my articles. All too often when a new person comes on board they are trained by one or more current staff/volunteers. If the "trainer" has not picked up any bad habits, this may work well, but in most positions, as a person becomes familiar with the work, they find shortcuts, some good and some bad. When the bad ones are passed on to new staff/volunteers, the problems perpetuate. New team members should receive training from the same sources such as books, videos or the same trainers. This ensures everyone learns the right way to do things from the beginning.

By visible communication I mean you shouldn't be shy about posting instructions at every possible location in your building. Also, be very clear in the messaging. Don't say "remember to use the right amount of bleach". Instead, your sign should say "use X oz of bleach for every gallon of water", or "The yellow buckets, when filled, hold Y gallons of water". But that is not all. Also communicate why this is important. "Too much bleach is bad for our animals ..." and "using too much bleach costs us \$Y, which could be going to direct animal care".

Posting instructions is something I have seen in many shelters, so that part isn't new, but I rarely have seen any explanation of why staff/volunteers are being asked to follow these

directions. In general, people are more likely to follow instructions if they understand why they are being asked to do so. This leads to the third and most important way to change people's behaviors.

In my youth, my incentive for following my fathers rules was to avoid getting in trouble, but in our workplace, avoiding trouble may not be as effective as trying to achieve a goal, which you can easily establish. For example, 25% of the money we save on our electricity bill will be put aside and staff/volunteers get to determine how to spend this money on our animals. You have just created an incentive for change and people will not only alter their own behavior but they will be looking to help others do the same because there is a reward for doing so. The added benefit is that the reward comes back to your agency in that it directly helps your animals.

I will end this article with an example:

As of August 13, 2022, I can purchase dish soap in three different quantities, all are 38 oz bottles:

- 4 bottles for \$8.75
- 8 bottles for \$8.50
- 12 bottles for \$8.00

The manufacturer instructions say to use 1 - 2 teaspoons of product for every 5 liters of water and the shelf life of the product is 1 year.

If we used the recommended quantities and did 2 loads of dishes a day, 4 bottles would last 365 days (or 1 year).

If we use more soap than the recommended amounts, we will use more bottles of soap and waste money. If we purchase the 12 bottles of soap because of the quantity discount, 8 bottles will expire before we use them and thus, we lose money.

How to best communicate this information is up to you, but don't you think your team is more likely to use the right amount of dish soap if they see the ramifications of using too much? I contend that in this simple example, your agency would purchase less soap and it would be used more efficiently by your team, thus leaving more money for other agency needs.