HACKING KINDNESS

OPTIMIZATION TACTICS FOR
BETTER BEHAVIOR

SAY "BE A VOTER", NOT "GO VOTE!"

People always look to affirm their identity as a good person, and usually don't like being told what to do. So refer to identity rather than behavior to make people take a positive action. For example, praise your kid for being a "helper" rather than "for helping". Or encourage people to "be a voter" rather than "go vote".

AVOID SOCIAL PRESSURE IN NEW SITUATIONS

People with a high fear of others' judgment are less likely to take any action in social situations. But, an audience may make us perform better on well-rehearsed behavior.

Can you create both social and non-social paths to contribute in your system?

REMIND THEM OF MORAL NORMS

People shape their behaviour after moral norms, so invoke those if you can. Try childhood reminders, religious symbols or accountability cues like cameras or receipts.

You can also just tell people that they should consider what a moral action would be.

LEAVE NO ROOM FOR DOUBT

People are less likely to help out if a situation is ambiguous. If a situation is not ambiguous, they tend to think of their own responsibility as more ambiguous.

Remove ambiguity in your system and clarify who's responsible.

See also: Bystander Effect

NURTURE A VIRTUOUS CYCLE

Performing kind acts increase mood, self-esteem and release of endorphins. The brain areas responding to pleasure also activate in response to our own kindness. This can be addictive, leading to more kind acts.

Can you make a small act of kindness become a long term relationship?

DOWNPLAY RECENT VIRTUOUS ACTS

If we have recently done something virtuous, we are more likely to give ourselves a free pass.

If time has passed, we are more likely to think about it in abstract terms. It will contribute to our identity as being a good person, and we act accordingly.

See also: Vicarious Self-Licencing

CHALLENGE THEIR GROUP BELONGING

If we already regard ourselves as virtuous, we can be less compelled to behave virtuously. This also holds if we regard ourselves as part of a group that has a good track record, even if we have not ourselves contributed. Be careful about how you talk about group membership, so you don't give people a free pass.

See also: Moral Self-Licencing

CREATE A USEFUL MOOD

Both positive and negative moods can increase and decrease kind behavior. We want to maintain a good mood, but escape a bad mood, and kind behavior can be both a challenge and opportunity for both goals. Pay attention to the mood of your users, but check your assumptions.

See also: Emotional Contagion

A GOOD ACT IS A GREAT ESCAPE FROM A BAD MOOD

People seek relief from negative moods. This can drive kind and helpful behavior towards others in need. It's a self-serving drive to seek positivity for the sake of feeling better.

REMIND PEOPLE ABOUT THEIR RELIGION

Cues about religion can increase kind behavior with religious users. This is a robust effect, but there are drawbacks. It can increase racial prejudice and it might limit itself to members of the same religion.

See also: Vicarious Self-Licencing

CREATE GUILT, THEN OFFER RELIEF

Inducing guilt can increase kindness and charitable giving.

This can become a dark pattern. If too strong it can lead to an counter-arguing effect. If people can't find relief, they might self-punish as a substitute.

See also: Negative State Relief

SHOW THE SITUATION, THEN SHOW IT AGAIN

We tend to overestimate the effect of personality on other people's actions. Even when we know a situation is entirely the cause, we still do this. Conversely, we explain our own behavior with external factors. Try challenging both tendencies.

See also: Defensive Attribution

CREATE SIMPLE STARTER ACTS

Contributing can be daunting. Newcomers to a system benefit from starting out with simple, low-risk tasks. This is most effective if they can observe senior contributors and have access to the same tools.

DON'T MAKE THEM FEEL EXCLUDED

Social exclusion increases aggression, leads to less cooperation and increases risk taking & procrastination. It even reduces analytical reasoning. Can your system make users feel included? Excluded?

SEED THE GROUP MOOD

Moods are contagious in both offline and online systems. Knowing mood affects likelihood to behave kindly, what is it like in your system? Can you influence the group mood?

See also: Mood

EMPHASIZE THE HARM IN INACTION

Omission bias is the tendency to judge harmful action as worse than equally harmful inaction.

MAKE THEM CONFESS

People who reveal personal facts or confess misdeeds tend to behave kinder afterwards. This is particularly dependent on getting positive feedback.

DISTRUST YOUR USERS' WORDS

People tend to answer survey and interview questions in a socially desirable way. Quite a few techniques exists to make people tell the truth. For example, ask indirect questions or create a distracting environment. You also want to observe behavior directly instead of relying on surveys.

CALL OUT SIMILARITIES

We don't like the idea of misfortune happening to us, and we don't like to be responsible for it. We tend to see others as less responsible for their own misfortune, the more they are like ourselves.

We also see others as more responsible, the more severe their misfortune is.

See also: Correspondence Bias

TONE DOWN RISKS

We always believe we are less likely than others to experience negative events. This leads us to take more risk and plan less for adversity. Emphasizing risks and consequences actually increases this effect.

Making people compare themselves to smaller groups, like their friends, can work better.

MAKE COMPETITIONS TEAMWORK

Both winning and losing competitions tend to increase dishonesty and unethical behavior. But, if people feel they won because others helped, it might work in the opposite direction.

ASSOCIATE INACTION AND IGNORANCE

We mistakenly believe most others have different opinions and concerns than us.

For example, people assume others are less worried about avoiding embarrassment. This leads us to let others' inaction influence us too much, as we believe they are better informed.

See also: Bystander Effect

HELP THEM FLAUNT THEIR GOOD DEEDS

Status seeking can inspire kind behavior. You can create healthy competition or reward kindness by making it visible.

This can also backfire, by leading us towards less effective but visible acts.

See also: Emotional Selfishness

CONFRONT OBEDIENCE TO UNHELPFUL NORMS

People tend to regard rule-breaking as a positive, if it's perceived to be for a greater good. Yet, we overestimate our ability to disobey and often follow even unreasonable requests.

APPROACH PEOPLE AFTER A MISDEED

After violating a moral norm, people tend to act kinder. Can you provide an outlet for the good behavior? It also works the other way. People are often less likely to take a positive action if they just did.

See Also: Moral Self-Justification

MAKE REWARDS SUBTLE OR PRIVATE

People who are observed doing kind acts for rewards are judged as less moral than people who do not do the act at all. Be careful with public awards and praise for individual actions.

See also: Overjustification Effect

DO SOMETHING AMAZING

Feelings of awe increase ethical decision making, generosity and kindness. It makes us feel better about ourselves. Awe creates a feeling of time slowing down and makes people pay better attention to the moment. Can your product amaze your users? Can you reach them at a moment of awe?

SIGNAL THAT IT'S THEIR TIME TO ACT

Individuals are less likely to help a victim the more other people are present. Can you clarify responsibility in your system? Can you reduce the perception of inactive bystanders?

There's a wide range of factors that moderate this effect. Familiarity with the subject, competence, level of emergency, accountability, ambiguity and more.

PLACE THEM IN THE SHOES OF OTHERS

Moral, social or perceptual perspective taking makes people more willing to help. This includes in computer games and virtual reality simulations.

TRUST THE GOOD IN PEOPLE

The altruistic-empathic hypothesis is the idea that we help others out of empathy, in ways just self-interest can't explain.

Consider if you need to provide any sort of reward to motivate contributions. Is it enough that people empathize with others in your system?

DON'T PROVIDE REWARDS

Providing rewards for kindness might reduce our natural motivation to be kind. This might lead to an long-term reduction in kind behavior. Do you tie positive outcomes to individual actions?

See also: Helper's High

GET A COMMITMENT FOR LATER

People tend to value a reward now higher than an equal reward in the future. This also works in reverse: a donation now is a bigger request than an equal donation in the future.

USE PEOPLE'S OWN WORDS

We are more likely to act kindly if someone uses our words, tone and postures. This is not limited towards the mimic, but inspires kindness in general.

CREATE MULTIPLE REASONS TO CONTRIBUTE

People contribute to online communities in different ways, for different reasons. Consider if your users contribute for socializing, information, visibility, or altruistic reasons. Are everyone's motivations met? Are you optimizing for the real reason users are using your system?

See also: Social Value Orientation

STRIP THEM OF THEIR ILLUSIONS OF FAIRNESS

The Just World Fallacy is the belief that actions will have appropriate consequences. This might lead to antisocial behavior by providing victim-blaming as a moral justification.

We even make up reasons for why misfortune happens to people, to maintain this belief.

MAKE IT FAMILIAR

We are more likely to be kind towards people we perceive as similar to ourselves. This is not limited to physical similarity. Social identity, values and attitudes can also trigger feelings of familiarity.

Can you call out or create similarities between people in your system?

See also: Defensive Attribution

MANAGE BOTH SAINTS AND SINNERS

Individuals differ in how much they value the welfare of others. When we assume the same reasons motivate everyone equally, we tend to be wrong.

See also: Community Benefits

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