**To get people to change, make change easy**

It is 9:00AM in our New York City office, and one of us stops by the fifth-floor kitchen to pick up a free piece of fruit — a healthy **perk** that my company offers its employees. When he arrives, he faces a familiar s……..t: the bananas are already gone and only the oranges remain. When other **hopefuls** approach and find the bananas missing, they do not take a free orange. They just walk away. What is wrong with these people? Is there a subculture of orange haters at our company?

It turns out the answer is no. Another one of us has observed this ph…………… in hundreds of companies across the country. We’ve come to think of it as the Banana Principle: bananas always go first, oranges last. It is not about the fruit itself. A psychologist might say it’s about human nature; a designer might say it’s about usability.

It’s not that bananas are objectively more d…………. than oranges. The difference in their popularity comes ………… to one thing: how easy they are to **peel**. (Yes, you might say bananas are more   
*a-peeling*.)

To see how the Banana Principle a………… in other contexts, imagine that you are leading a change initiative at your company to increase cross-team collaboration by 30% by the end of the year. How would you do it? Just telling people to collaborate wouldn’t be enough. Instead, you’d have to get creative.

Another way to think about this is friction. Friction is the force that …………. things down. Most trains combat friction by applying **grease** to the tracks. The world’s fastest trains, like China’s 217 mph bullet, use magnets to make the trains f………. above the tracks. Consider how this analogy applies to the way employees operate. What positive actions are **thwarted** by small obstacles? What bad h………. are easy to continue? How might you introduce friction so that **detrimental** behaviours are harder to start? And how might you reduce friction so that positive actions feel more like a glide than an **uphill trek**?

Over a century ago, the philosopher Guillaume Ferrero proposed that humans operate on the **Principle of** ………….. **Effort**: given several paths, we pick the easiest. More recently, Harvard psychologist Shawn Anchor suggested that the behaviour we choose is the one that’s just 20 seconds easier to start. (We **can’t help but** observe that this is almost the exact amount of time it takes to peel an orange vs. a banana.)

Here’s an elegant example of the Banana Principle from 1stdibs, an online art and design marketplace. The culture at 1stdibs is warm and welcoming, but as at many high growth companies, new **hires** weren’t getting enough attention from more experienced employees. The friction? It is tricky to spot the **newbies** and tough to remember they need a little extra care. So, the HR team at 1stdibs decided to give all new hires a balloon that says “1st Day at 1stdibs.” The balloon h……… above the newbie’s desk, silently inviting everyone to i…………….. themselves and offer support.

A consulting firm we’ve worked with uses the Banana Principle to **facilitate** cross-team collaboration. The friction standing in the way of **seamless** interaction? Doors and legs. Yes, it just takes a bit of e……….. to walk over to someone’s office and open the door, but even that seemed to be too much to a…… at this firm. So to **combat** this friction, the company set aside neutral space for cross-functional teams. Most workplaces have **enclosed** conference rooms for this p…………., but conference rooms take time and effort to book, and they don’t **flex** well to accommodate the needs of different groups. So this consulting firm **designated** several door-less spaces for employees to use however they needed. Then they went a step further by ordering chairs and tables with wheels at the bottoms of their legs, making it easy to roll together rather than d………ing furniture into place.

Even if you aren’t designing an office, it’s worth considering how you can re-configure your workspace to f………r target behaviours. Want certain people to talk to each other more? Seat them close together or give them a shared place to go. Want people to do more brainstorming? Put up whiteboards or have st…….s of Post-It notes in every room. Want to encourage more feedback? Create spots for private conversation or hand out gift cards for local cafés. Want people to recycle more? Place large bins in various spots around the office.

But what if your goal is to stop or reduce a behaviour? If so, you’ll need to d…….. inspiration from oranges rather than bananas. In other words, introduce more friction. For example, let’s say you had a problem with teenagers **loiter**ing near your business. You could yell at them or ……. ……. **menacing** signs, but none of those tactics is likely to work on rebellious teens. To put the Banana Principle to work, you’d want to make it slightly less pl………… to spend time there. Two **underpass**es in London with a chronic and dangerous teen loitering problem did just that, installing pink lighting that immediately **scatter**ed the teens. Why did it work so well? Pink lighting makes **acne** /ækni/ more prominent.

The Banana Principle also works on a much smaller scale. For example, website-building company Squarespace wanted to reduce multitasking during its employee training sessions. They knew that a “no phones” policy wouldn’t **go over well with** its tech-loving staff. So instead, the HR team introduced friction between people and their phones. They left a box of tiny toys in every conference room, ranging from spinners to Slinkys, to d…………t people from their phones. People now **fidget with** the toys throughout the training rather than checking their phones. Counterintuitive as it may seem, introducing these toys has made the training sessions more productive.

An elegant “orange” we see across many companies is the use of headphones in open plan work spaces to **deter** shoulder taps and “quick questions.” Seeing co-workers with headphones on makes it slightly uncomfortable to start an **impromptu** conversation. Still, one team we worked with found that **earbud** headphones weren’t enough to **keep** distractions **at bay**. Co-workers simply waved in front of each other’s faces. To increase the orange factor, the team’s manager gave everyone large, red headphones — then the number of interruptions **plummet**ed. To combat interruptions to a greater degree, the glasses retailer Warby Parker created a library space for its employees where quiet is encouraged, including a secret room hidden behind a bookshelf for total privacy.

Notice that the examples we’ve shared require no persuasive speeches, requests, or explanations. The power of the Banana Principle lies in its simplicity and its silence. So, next time you are **tempted** to convince someone (or even yourself) to change a behaviour, consider how you might change the friction level instead. Find ways to make the positive behaviours feel more like bananas and the negative behaviours feel more like oranges. And for the love of fruit, stop buying your employees oranges if they remain uneaten.

1. Does your company **foster** / stimulate change / innovation / initiative? In what way?
2. How would you describe your company culture?

**Match these types of company culture to their descriptions:**

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| --- | --- |
| **Market-Driven** | Team members challenge the status quo and constantly find ways to improve, innovate, and develop new services and offerings |
| **Creative** | They tend to get rid of hierarchies and create a more supportive work environment where employees are just as involved and valued as upper management. They are likely to use open and informal communication |
| **Purpose-Driven** | They thrive on providing the best customer service possible and are always willing to go to the next level to keep customers happy. |
| **Adhocracy** | The can be risk-averse and focus on preventing mistakes, sticking to rules and tradition, and managing failure. They rely on a structure of upper managers, supervisors, and employees at various ranks with appropriate responsibilities. |
| **Innovative** | They may focus less on employee experience and satisfaction and more on performance and results. They are results-oriented, hard-working, demanding, and highly competitive. |
| **Hierarchy** | They are built on a defined, shared reason for being, and they attract employees, customers, and partners who share those ideals. |
| **Clan** | They are constantly looking for ways to build on existing technology and create new solutions. Conventional thoughts and methods get pushed to the side each day in favour of new ideas. |
| **Customer-Focused** | They focus on the end goal and do what they can to bring those visions to life. Employees typically work together on teams and contribute ideas with the intention of providing the world with a new experience. |