

Leisure Behaviour Change

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In our field, practitioners have spent decades trying to figure out how to change leisure behaviour. In fact, that is a big part of all our jobs. The Pandemic has brought this challenge to a head.

What does it take to shift leisure behaviours in a post COVID world? Carrots or sticks? How does one reduce fear or provide an incentive to bring back indoor facility use? Canadians spent \$1B on home fitness equipment during COVID lockdowns. Will it be used for more than hanging laundry to dry in a spare room?

Social psychologists suggest that behaviour change is challenging and complex. But, it starts with something called the Motivation Equation. On one side, a person needs to picture **the difference between the current self and the ideal self**. And, that difference needs to be compelling and significant. For example, it might be my current self at 220 pounds, and my ideal self at 180 pounds. On the other side of the equation is a **Pathway of Hope** that has to be as significant as the discrepancy on the other side of the equation. If I have no hope of losing 40 pounds, either because I have tried before and failed, or because I don't have the confidence that I can do it, the equation is unequal and behaviour change won't happen.

Discrepancy Between Current Self and Ideal Self

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Pathway of Hope





The challenge: Increasing use of our indoor recreation spaces in a Post COVID world



The important part of that Pathway of Hope is the complex balance between incentives to change behaviour vs disincentives to maintain the status quo. Each application of this balance may need to be different, but we all need to look at **both** sides of this “carrot and stick” pathway.

 **Incentives to Use Recreation Facilities:** In order to fill our recreation facilities again we need to provide some incentives to draw users into the spaces. We need to add to the value proposition that exists now and existed before the onset of COVID. For example, if Seniors Swim didn't include a free post swim coffee before the pandemic, try adding it now as a special new feature. Or, try a “Bring a Friend for Free” aspect to another drop in or program session as a special price incentive feature. You could also try to market around the message of “loosing your COVID related sedentary 10 pounds” at our facility. Incentives to use the facility work, but have to be balanced against forces not to use them.

 **Reduce Fear of Using Recreation Facilities:** If fear of being too close to others, sharing the same air or touching the same surfaces is the basis for indoor virus transmission, we have to message why this has been minimized in our facility. Those messages have to be consistently replicated. Remember that “repetition is the foundation of clarity” in the messaging world. All organizations that depend on marketing are focusing on this to change their messaging. One small example is AirBnB. They have added a new Health and Safety section to the description of each of their rental locations to feature their new Enhanced Cleaning Process and many of those properties mention new “Touchless Checkin” options without someone meeting you at the door that also adds to convenience. Airlines have featured their enhanced air handling systems on planes marketing that they are now “the safest place to be” sitting indoors wearing a mask.

 **Add a Social Dimension:** In this “carrot and stick” pathway of hope, one more thing is important. It is always easier to change behaviour with someone else along for the ride. Having a soul mate or mentor eases the path through changing behaviour. Knowing that someone is supportive and has expectations that you can do it greases the pathway and helps a person along it. In recreation that could mean a new mentorship program or a “bring a new friend for free day” in our Fee structure.

Dynamic change will continue to drive our decision making for some time, but the fundamentals of the above-described balance and pathway will likely remain a cornerstone to those decisions.

Good luck!



Questions To Consider:

- How many of you think that post COVID (whenever that is) will see users come flooding back into the indoor recreation spaces we operate?
- Which incentives to motivate facility use have you tried that appear to have worked well?
- What have you done to reduce fear of facility use that have been successful?

Note: Much of the above material came from a Kristen Johnston, who was part of a virtual panel discussion sponsored by the Recreation Foundation of BC in January of 2022.

