A nudge is a subtle change to the information that is presented, or the framing of the choice, so that people choose to do something different. The goal is to predictably alter the behavior of people, 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.

An often-cited example of nudging is the practice of placing healthy foods in a cafeteria at eye level, while putting less healthy food in harder-to-reach places. Individuals are not prevented from eating whatever they want, but the arranging of the food choices in that way has the effect of decreasing consumption of junk food and increasing consumption of healthier food.

Nudging Toward Safety Progress

By Terry D. Thedell

A gas and electric utility employs 4,400 employees to provide service to its customers with a multitude of gas and electric transmission and distribution facilities. On any day, any number of utility employees drive either company-owned or personal vehicles on company business. The need for a defensive driving program became evident to reduce motor vehicle incidents, so the company launched a nationally recognized driver training program.

Interestingly, the company has no company policy or standard requiring defensive driver training other than the nudge expectation that drivers with routine work vehicle activities and/or more than 3,000 miles annually are expected to take the initial and annual refresher training. The defensive driving program became an enthusiastic company norm without further corporate regulation and has been reinforced as an evaluation criterion in motor vehicle incident investigations as needed.

To lessen the ever-increasing amount of hard-core safety paternalism and company attitudes toward safety as unwelcome kindness, never write a corporate policy when a safety standard will do, never write a safety standard when a guideline will do and never write a guideline when a safety nudge will do.

References


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