

Positive Reinforcement in UAMS Parking Operations

The University of Arkansas for Medical Sciences currently runs a parking system that allows parking patrons to pay fees at a manned exit both when leaving campus. It is a system that has been in place for decades and has become outdated due to upgrades in technology within the Parking Industry. With this in mind, UAMS has decided to upgrade its parking equipment moving from a cashier based system to an electronic one. Its goal is to move cashiers out of the booths and turn them into mobile Ambassadors to assist customers. Because it is a new position, there is a performance gap in the professional knowledge to fulfill this Ambassador role and with that an increased level of frustration.

Because of this change, UAMS Parking Operations is now faced with a morale problem. The old sedentary ways of servicing customers in a controlled environment is changing into a more active role affected by the weather. Prior to this, employees and management had a good working relationship, but now team members are becoming less productive and turnover is starting to become high. In the past, UAMS has ran into similar situations and has been able to satisfy team members with wage increases. However, recent budget cuts make it difficult to offer suitable wage increases for the expanded job activity.

To address this problem Parking Operations needs to generate a plan to raise moral without including a turbulent wage increase. Before, much of reinforcement has been in the form of progressive discipline, structured as a combination of Punishment I (verbal and written warnings) and Punishment II (suspensions and termination) (Ormrod, 2012, p. 57). Because of this, team members have associated motivation in a negative fashion which should be replaced with a new means of positive reinforcement. Therefore, a plan should be devised to offer an

improved benefit package that would be more stable and easier to manage than a wage increase. With employee concern over increased responsibility, changing environments, and other worries, the idea is to reward the team members with valuable benefits in exchange for an increased workload, loyalty to the university, and higher morale.

Since a new benefits package has never been offered before, and previous motivational attempts have been negative or punitive by nature, there should be a period of adjustment. In the past UAMS has attempted to counteract this negativity by interjecting secondary reinforcers in the form of wage increases (Ormrod, 2012, p. 53). However, currently this is not a feasible option and recently workforce turnover has increased to 33 percent. The new benefits package should help stabilize employment and decrease workforce turnover. Once team members start benefiting from the new package, the overall morale should increase.

Also, the new benefits package would act as a stimuli in more than one way. It would be a combination of positive and negative reinforcements. The new package would be an increased benefit to employees (positive) while reducing the threat of unemployment (negative). This combination would ultimately lead to Parking Operations achieving its goal by reinforcing employee behavior with valuable rewards while keeping its financial impact stable. By using positive reinforcement, the problem of low employee morale within Parking Operations should be eliminated (Ormrod, 2012).

If Parking Operations wants to get more from their employees they are going to have to give more. The result of changing the way they are motivating their employees is what's needed. Parking Operations should learn from and build upon the results of B.F. Skinner's rat

experiment. In the beginning, Skinner was frustrated with the lack of the rats' responses to his reward system. He was blaming the rats because of the undesired responses he was receiving but later found the problem was in his design. "He had been designing his experiments poorly, and his rats were responding rationally to a flawed reward system" (Kerr & Rifkin, 2008 p.8).

UAMS should come to the same realization that Skinner had, and recognize that changes need to occur in order for everyone to benefit in the end.

References

Kerr, S., & Rifkin, G. (2008). *Reward Systems: Does Yours Measure Up?* Boston, MA: Harvard Business Review Press

Ormrod, J. (2012). *Human Learning* (6th ed.). Boston, MA: Pearson