

## **Environment**

Your environment and the expectations of that environment should be persuasive. There is a theory asserted by James Wilson and George Kelling called the Broken Window Theory. In this theory, they suggest, using a broken window as an example, that a building full of broken windows will cause people to assume that no one cares for the building or its appearance. This in turn will spur more vandalism. In other words, the environment's condition gives suggestions that lead people to hold certain assumptions, and people then act on those assumptions. The broken window invites greater vandalism and crime. In his book, *Tipping Point*, Malcom Gladwell uses an example of the Broken Window Theory as he explains the New York City subway clean up. The subway system was in dire need of rebuilding – a multibillion-dollar endeavor. With the system about to collapse, the focus was understandably on issues like crime reduction strategies and subway reliability. George Kelling, a consultant hired by the New York Transit Authority, urged officials to utilize the Broken Window Theory. David Gunn immediately assigned people to start cleaning up all the graffiti. Removing the graffiti seemed to be of such little consequence compared to everything else there was to worry about, but Gunn was insistent. In his own words,

“The graffiti was symbolic of the collapse of the system. When you looked at the process of rebuilding the organization and morale, you had to win the battle against graffiti. Without winning that battle, all the management reforms and physical changes just weren't going to happen. We were about to put out new trains that were worth about ten million bucks apiece, and unless we did something to protect them, we knew just what would happen. They would last one day and then they would be vandalized.”

Gunn set up specific goals, timetables, and even cleaning stations. If any train came back with graffiti, it had to be cleaned immediately before it could go out again. For the vandals who had spent their nights, toiling into the wee morning hours painting their murals, it sent a strong message. Seeing their masterpieces already painted over again by the cracking of the next morning's light told them they were wasting their time. The entire anti-graffiti campaign took years, but finally, it subsided.

The hope and expectations you can create in your persuasive environment will forecast your ability to persuade. One experiment was conducted on the influence of light. Lab rats were placed in jars of water to see how long they would keep trying to swim before giving up. Some of the jars were placed in complete darkness, while others had light shining into them. The results were dramatic! The rats in the dark swam for about three minutes before succumbing. The rats with the light swam up to thirty-six hours – more than 700 times longer than the rats in the dark!

In another study, volunteers were asked to participate in an experiment on prison environments. Half of the volunteers posed as prison workers, while the other half posed as prison inmates. The results were astounding. Previously tested to be psychologically sound people, the participants rapidly became more and more hostile, crude, rebellious, and abusive – both those acting as inmates *and* as guards! One “prisoner” became so

hysterical and emotionally distressed that he had to be released. The study was supposed to last two weeks but was called off after only six days!

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