

# Two Very Different Drivers Behind the Wheel: Spock and Homer

Although most of us think of ourselves as predominantly rational, thoughtful beings, psychological research consistently tells another story. Much of the information that comes into our brain is processed unconsciously in a way that is under the radar of our rational selves.

Neuroscientists believe that there are two complimentary systems driving our decisions:

**The rational, conscious, deliberate brain**

**The unconscious, impulsive, sensory-driven brain.**

These systems work in tandem when we make a decision, though they do not always agree on the right course of action. In the book *Nudge*, Thaler and Sunstein call our rational system of thinking “Mr. Spock” and the impulsive, unconscious system “Homer Simpson.”

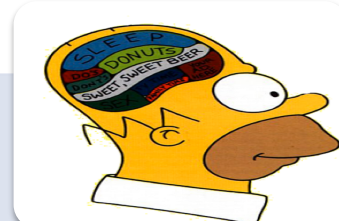


**Mr. Spock is slow to make a decision**

**Carefully considers the facts and options**

**Unemotional, (Follows logic to make a decision)**

**We utilize Mr. Spock when we weigh the pros and cons of purchasing a car, count calories in a recipe, or strategize at an office planning session. His is a slow, deliberate process.**



**Homer Simpson, on the other hand, is quick to make a decision**

**Doesn't think much about decisions**

**Emotional**

**Uses his gut (literally and figuratively) as a guide**

**Homer responds to subtle cues from his surroundings, including familiarity, emotional reactions, and social norms.**

A car-purchasing decision provides a good example of these two sides of ourselves. Whereas Mr. Spock may buy the car for its fuel economy or its price point, Homer wants to drive that car home because he feels ten years younger when he's behind the wheel. Perhaps not surprisingly, our conscious brain does not “see” the influence that our less rational side has on it. We like to feel that our decisions are based on thought-out consideration of all the facts. This is simply not the case. Our Homer selves are at work

in every decision we make, sometimes overruling Mr. Spock's guidance on the matter. (Anyone else ever ruin a diet with a homemade chocolate chip cookie? Homer approves). In times of stress, when multi-tasking, or merely when unfocused, Homer's influence over our actions is even greater.

### ***So, what's this got to do with sustainability?***

Well, most appeals to sustainable behavior have targeted Mr. Spock. We discuss carbon emissions, give facts on recycling, and encourage more mindful behavior. Mr. Spock is listening. He may have even bought a new bike to ride to work and is excited to reap the economic and health benefits of doing so.

Meanwhile, Homer walks over to his couch and takes a nap. He isn't buying it. Once the fun of buying a new toy went away, Homer overrides the decision of actually riding to work. Biking's too hard, there's too many cars on the road, and you get to work too sweaty.

In order for us to be successful at changing behavior, we have to appeal to both Homer and Mr. Spock. Purchasing a fun bike, riding in a group, or taking scenic routes may appease Homer's unconscious desires. Using our Mr. Spock brain, we can also get to the root of Homer's rejection, and thereby come up with strategies to combat unthinking urges. Focus on the fun rather than the difficulty, the freedom of the road rather than the number of cars, and the ease of changing into clothes when you arrive at work rather than the sweat.

Ultimately, we must use our Spock brain to develop the strategies for changing behavior. But the plans and programs we develop must appeal to the Homer in us all. If it doesn't engage our unconscious self, it won't be a success.

### **Think about it!**

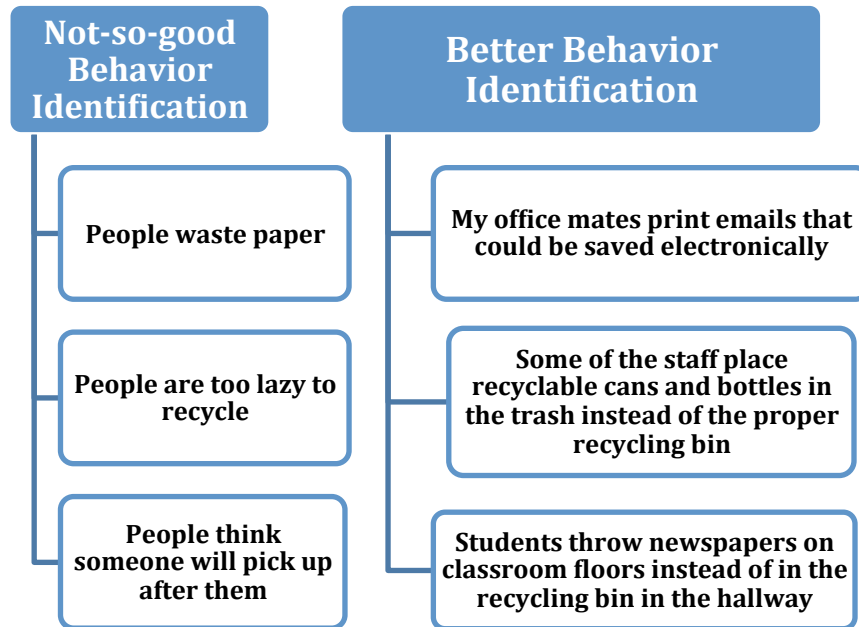
Knowing what you know about Homer and Spock, why are people so hesitant to get involved with sustainable actions?

**Mr. Spock**

**Homer**

## What are you trying to change?

In order to get people to do what you want, you have to be clear about the behavior you want to see. This may seem obvious, but pinpointing what you want to see, as well as identifying the behavior you are observing, takes some time and attention. If we don't do this, we run the risk of becoming frustrated, blaming people's laziness, and not being able to communicate effectively.



### ***"Name That Behavior"***

Now we'd like you to consider your own workplace and the behavior you would like to see. Consider the behavior you currently see and the behavior you want to see. Remember, you need to be specific. Here are examples of behaviors you might observe to help you work through this section.

**Write Current Behavior here:**

**Write Behavior You Want to See here:**

## So, what's the problem in your office?

**Take 2 - 3 minutes and brainstorm all of the possible reasons the behavior you want to see is not happening.** Don't hold back! This will help you dig deeper and discover some of the obstacles to the behavior you want to see. We will come back to these and show you how to use them to inspire change!

## B. Who are you trying to change?

Next, you have to know **who** you are trying to change. In other words, you have to **know your audience**.

Efforts to change behavior will only work if you tailor them to a specific group of people. If you are going to succeed, you have to know your audience's interests and motivations. What drives them? Who influences them? How can you appeal to both their Homer and their Spock sides?

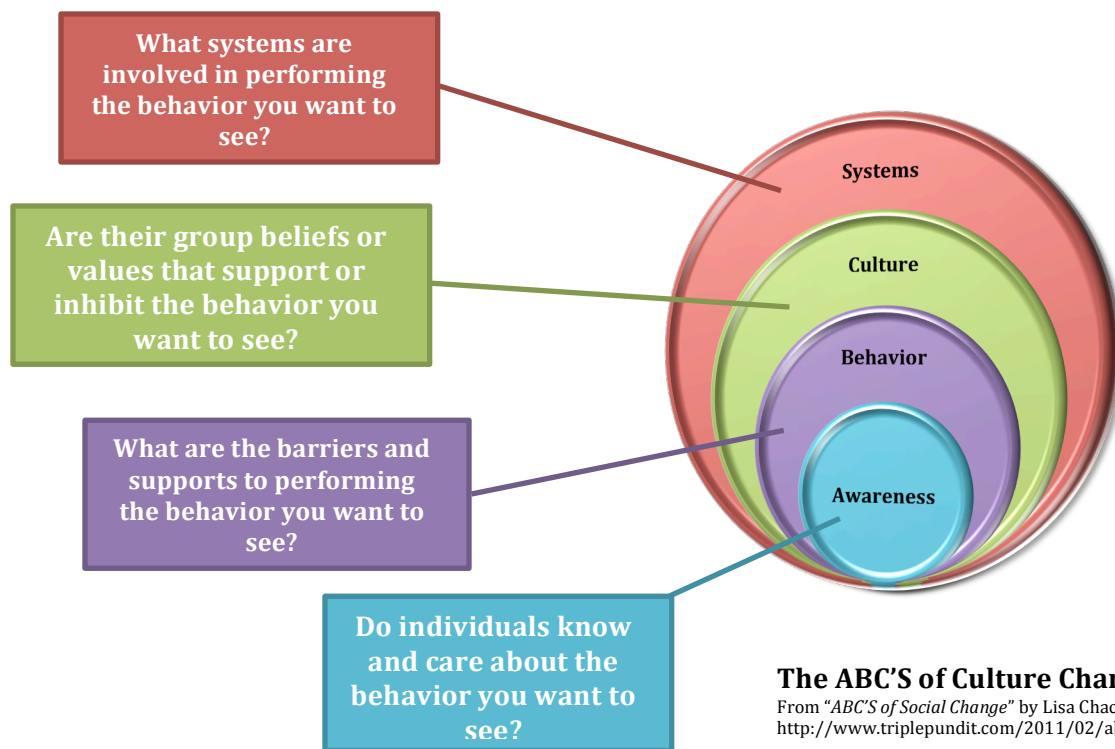
**My audience:**

## Understanding Behavior Change – the ABC’S of Change

This section of this toolkit looks more closely at specific behaviors and introduces our model for change. Spock will like the model but we’ll try to keep Homer excited and engaged too!

Psychologists, sociologists, and other behavior change specialists debate how and why people alter their behaviors. There is no single right answer, but it does help to think about the different factors that lead to behavior change. People are profoundly influenced by other people, cultural norms, and their environment.

Below is a model of the “ABC’s of Culture Change” that we utilize to help us think about the multifaceted influences on our behavior.



### Pieces of the Puzzle: A Closer Look at the Model

Below are explanations for each of the areas in the above *ABC’S of Change* model. For each area of the model we present a “key question.” This question is offered as a simplified way of thinking about and using the particular area.

**Awareness:** Awareness pertains to:

- ✓ a person's familiarity of (do know they know about it),
  - ✓ knowledge of (do they understand its importance),
  - ✓ and attitude toward (do they care) the behavior you want to see.
- These factors greatly influence our actions.

The differences between Homer and Spock focus on this level. Think about our Spock side when delivering information about a behavior and its importance. Keep Homer in mind when considering the attitude toward a behavior.

**Key Awareness Questions to Ask:** *Do individuals know, understand the importance, and care about the behavior you want to see?*

**Behavior:** At its simplest, behavior is the observable action a person performs. It is the crux of this model. In order for people to successfully complete the behavior you want to see, you must first identify the behavior in specific terms. Next, look for any barriers to performing the behavior, as well as what supports the behavior.

You really need to use your Spock brain to focus in on a specific behavior that people will be willing and able to perform. Knowing the barriers and supports will help you target strategies to encourage your audience to act out the behavior you want to see.

**Key Behavior Questions to Ask:** *Is the behavior you want to see specific and performable? What are the barriers and supports to performing the behavior?*

**Culture:** Culture represents the shared behaviors, values, and attitudes of a particular group. Much like awareness, culture is not outwardly visible, but it reveals itself in our actions. Research on behavior suggests that people are significantly influenced by the actions of people around them, even though we like to think of ourselves as independent and free thinkers.

Many of the strategies used to pinpoint your audience have to do with culture. People who share an office, for example, are likely to share similar beliefs and tendencies toward work priorities and behaviors. However, the culture is much larger than your office alone. It also includes the shared traditions of the organization as a whole and the local geographic region.

Much of the work you did to determine your audience in the worksheet above is related to culture. The motivations, influences, and values inherent in your audience are important to keep in mind when designing behavior change techniques.

**Key Culture Question:** *What are the group beliefs or values that support or inhibit the behavior you want to see?*

**Systems:** A system is a group of interrelated parts working together for a specific purpose. This may be a natural process, like the organs of your respiratory system allowing you to breathe, or it may be part of a human-built system, like the recycling and composting system we have on campus. Because the pieces of the system rely on each other for their optimal functioning, any part of the system that is not functioning properly or is missing has the potential to throw the entire system offline.

Think about riding a bike to campus. Let's say you understand the benefits of cycling, have a bike and know how to ride it, live close enough to commute, and have the support of your office to take some time to change when you arrive. A, B, and C are covered. However, if there are no bike paths or bike lanes from your home to your office, you may feel unsafe and unsupported by the system. The network of roads and paths is the barrier that would prevent you from adopting cycling as a new behavior. Likewise, if there is no recycling bin to put your can, you are more likely to throw it in the trash. Both of these are systems problems.

**Key Systems Questions:** *What systems are involved in performing the behavior? How does the current system support or inhibit the performance of the behavior? Is it possible to change the system?*

## Why Don't People Just Do What I Want: The ABC'S Worksheets

The ABC'S of Change is a tool used to assess the impact of four different areas—Awareness, Behavior, Culture, and Systems—that influence the behavior you want to see. The ABC'S are an assessment tool that force you to focus on a specific behavior, narrow down your audience, and allow you to identify greatest leverage points toward achieving your goal.

As you work through the worksheets, be sure to go back to the specific behavior you identified in Worksheet 1 and to the audience you identified in Worksheet 2.

## ABC'S Worksheets

### AWARENESS

We said previously that awareness pertains to a person's familiarity of, knowledge of, and attitude toward the behavior they want to see. This worksheet will help you determine whether or not your group should focus on increasing Awareness.

**Write the specific behavior in your office that needs to be changed below:**

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#### 1. Do they know about the new behavior?

For the audience you are focused on, please describe the overall awareness people have regarding the behavior listed above.

#### 2. Do they understand why the behavior matters?

For the audience you are focused on, describe how well people understand the importance (why they should adopt it) of the behavior listed above.

#### 3. Do they know how to perform the new behavior?

For the audience you are focused on, please describe how well people understand how to perform the behavior listed above.

#### 4. Do they care about the new behavior?

For the audience you are focused on, please describe how much people care about the behavior listed above.



# BEHAVIOR

At its simplest, behavior is the observable action a person performs. It is the heart of the ABC'S model. After you have defined the behavior in specific terms and identified the audience, you must then look for any barriers and supports to performing the behavior. Knowing the barriers and supports will help you target strategies to encourage your audience to act out the behavior you want to see.

**Please write the behavior you want to see (identified in Worksheet 1):**

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**Ability:** Does the audience you identified in Worksheet 2 have the ability to change this behavior at the present time?

**1. No**

**3. Maybe**

**5. Yes**



If your answer is no, you may want to refine your goal behavior to be more realistic for your target audience.

## Identifying Barriers

A barrier is an impediment standing in the way of progress. In behavioral terms, it is an obstacle between the behavior you see and the behavior you want to see. We must first identify barriers in order to remove them, though this may take some time. Sometimes barriers to a problem jump right out, but other times they are more difficult to find.

### *Step 1. Free Writing*

A great exercise to help you identify your barriers is called "free writing." Free writing is a form of brainstorming in which you simply write down all of the things that come to mind on a specific topic. For this exercise, consider what is standing in the way of people performing the behavior you want to see. Use the example below to help you out.

## Free Writing Example

*I think people forget they send something to the printer. In the moment they think of printing something and then when the moment passes they forget about it. They probably think, "I will pick it up later when I get up to take a break," but they don't remember. Printing is too easy and people don't really have an incentive NOT to print whatever they want to print. I see them printing websites, emails, whole reports, meeting agendas, and even some personal stuff. When more people had smaller printers at their desks, there was less paper waste. Our printer/copier is not really on the way to the break room or restroom so people don't naturally pass it, which would help them remember.*

Creatively brainstorm all of the reasons people don't people do the behavior you want to see.

## Step 2. Categorize barriers

Next, we will use your free writing exercise to categorize the barriers you identified in your free write. Simply go back through and look for succinct reasons within your brainstorm that people are not performing the behavior you want to see. Circle these. Next, try to think of explanations to explain these behaviors. The image below presents an example of how this is done.

**Example Free Writing – Wasting Paper**

I think people forget they send something to the printer. In the moment they think of printing something and then when the moment passes they forget about it. They probably think, "I will pick it up later when I get up to take a break," but they don't remember. Printing is too easy and people don't really have an incentive NOT to print whatever they want to print. I see them printing websites, even some personal stuff. When more people had paper waste. Our printer/copier is not really on the way so they don't naturally pass it which would help them.

**Barriers noted in the free-writing:**

- Printer location/convenience
- Forgetfulness
- Printing is too easy

Once you have completed Step 2, list the barriers to doing the new behavior?

_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____

## Identifying Supports

The flip side of a barrier is a support. These are resources that you can utilize to help you navigate constraints and reach your goal.

What are some supports that exist to help you?

_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____

# CULTURE

Change is much more difficult when the surrounding culture does not value the change—and much easier when it does!

Culture represents the shared behaviors, values, and attitudes of a particular group. Consider the audience you identified in worksheet 2. Think about what they have in common within the group, as well as what sets these people apart from others.

So, now that you know your audience. . .who is their herd? For example, CSO is part of Finance & Business at Penn State University so we could list our “pack” as the following:

## Example for Campus Sustainability Office

Groups they are a part of:	What they value:
Finance and Business	Premier education and research institution
Penn State University	Customer service, bottom-line thinking analysis
Sustainability in higher education culture	Social change, collaboration, environment

## Your Turn:

Groups they are a part of:	What they value::

Now consider what this group shares internally, as well as what sets them apart

What does the group have in common?	What sets the group apart from others?

**1. To what extent do the groups they are a part of inhibit the new behavior among the target audience?**

1	2	3	4	5
Completely Support the Behavior				Completely Inhibit the Behavior

**Explain:**

**2. To what extent does the shared values within the group inhibit new behavior?**

1	2	3	4	5
No barriers				Many barriers

**3. To what extent does what sets them apart from other inhibit new behavior?**

1	2	3	4	5
No barriers				Many barriers

# Systems

A system is a group of interrelated parts working together for a specific purpose. Systems must be considered when trying to change behavior since if one wants to bike to work or recycle a magazine, a system must be in place to support that behavior.

To carpool, there must be a system in place to support that behavior: an easy way to find people close to you with similar schedules, a way to coordinate pick up/drop off, flexible scheduling, etc. To recycle, there must a system in place: the right bins at the right place at the right time with appropriate signage and the back-end custodial and facilities support to make sure it all ends up at the recycling center.

There are four questions we can ask to help us pinpoint the relationship between the behavior we want to see and the system within which it operates.

- 1. What systems are involved in performing the behavior you want to see?**
- 2. How does the current system influence behavior?**
- 3. What barriers or limitations to performing the behavior are there on a systems level?**
- 4. What would a perfect system look like?**