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In Form no. 32

Make your message stick

What item of office stationery can make you more persuasive? Here's a clue: it's small and yellow and you probably have lots of them on your desk. It's a Post-It note, of course.

If you thought those sticky yellow notes were only good for remembering tasks and appointments, think again. Research by Randy Garner at Sam Houston University (USA) has revealed that Post-It notes pack a powerful persuasive punch by increasing your chances of getting people to respond to your written requests.

Garner asked three groups of people to complete and return surveys. A cover letter and a hand-written personalised Post-It note requesting completion accompanied Group 1's survey. Group 2 received the same survey with a similar hand-written request made directly on the cover letter. And Group 3 got nothing extra at all: just the survey and the cover letter.

The differing response rates of the three groups reveal the persuasive power of the Post-It note. An astonishing 75 percent of the people who received the survey with the personalised Post-It completed and returned it. And this in contrast to a 48 percent response rate for the second group and a 36 percent response rate for Group 3. No doubt about it, the Post-It note made all the difference.

Garner went on to conduct a follow-up experiment to get to the bottom of exactly why the Post-It should make such a difference. He wanted to find out if the bright yellow Post-It was simply attracting people's attention to the survey - or whether combining it with a personal message was the key. This time a third of the surveys were sent with a hand-written request on the Post-It, another third went with a blank Post-it, and the final third had no Post-it at all. In this case the hand-written Post-It produced a response rate of 69 percent, against 43 percent for the blank Post-It and 34 percent for the survey alone.

The bottom line is that simply sticking on that yellow note provides a big persuasive push. The

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explanation for this lies in the reciprocity principle. People recognise when the sender goes to the trouble of including a note and feel the need to reciprocate by returning the survey. This effect is obviously stronger when the Post-It includes a personalised message, but even the simple act of adding a blank Post-It produces a weakened reciprocal effect.

And by the way, people who received personalised Post-It messages gave more complete answers and returned their surveys more promptly! So what are you waiting for? Now you know why no one replies to your requests. Get those Post-It notes out and start making the reciprocity principle work for you.

If you'd like to learn more about persuasion and influencing, just sign up for one of our *Communication & Interpersonal Skills* courses. More information at www.readmatthews.com/courses/communication.php