

(Contributed by Christie Manning)

This activity came from Winter and Koger's 2004 book "The Psychology of Environmental Problems". It is the Behavioral Self-Control exercise. In my adaptation of the exercise, I asked students to do the following:

1. Choose a specific goal.
(e.g. I want to eat less meat)
2. Define the goal in behavioral terms.
(e.g. I will have 2 vegetarian meals per day)
3. Tell someone about the goal; make a public commitment.
4. Before making any changes, observe the behavior for 2 days and write down circumstances surrounding the behavior.
(e.g. I eat meat when there are no good vegetarian options, when I am in a hurry, when someone else cooks, etc.)
5. Examine the conditions under which the behavior occurs and look for ways to change the circumstances that lead to the non-goal behavior.
(e.g. I can make sure that there are always good vegetarian options available in my fridge or freezer)
6. Make a formal contract with yourself and with the class.
7. Put your plan into action for several days, then go back to keeping track of goal-related behaviors.

I have used this once. Nearly all the students in the class found this to be an extremely powerful exercise. It was a great demonstration to them of just how challenging behavior change can be, even under the best of circumstances.