

Five Apes and Company Policy

Start with a large zoo cage containing five apes. In the cage, hang a banana on a string and put stairs underneath. An ape will soon go to the stairs and start climbing toward the banana. As soon as it touches the stairs, spray all the apes with cold water. After a while, another ape makes an attempt with the same result - all the apes are sprayed with cold water. Continue this system repeatedly.

If, later, an ape tries to climb the stairs, the other apes will try to prevent it even though no water sprays them.

Now, remove one ape from the cage and replace it with a new one. Seeing the banana the new ape wants to climb the stairs. To its horror, all the other apes attack it. After repeated attempts and attacks, the new ape knows that if it tries to climb the stairs, it will be assaulted.

Next, remove another of the original five apes and replace it with a new one. The newcomer goes to the stairs and is attacked. The previous newcomer takes part in the punishment with enthusiasm.

Again, replace a third original ape with a new ape. The new one makes it to the stairs and is attacked as well. Two of the four apes that beat him have no idea why they were not permitted to climb the stairs, or why they're participating in beating the newest ape.

After replacing the fourth and fifth original apes, all the apes that have been sprayed with cold water have been replaced. None of the apes now in the cage has experienced the cold water. Nevertheless, no ape ever again approaches the stairs. Why not?

"Because that's the way it's always been around here."

That's how some company policies begin. That's mimics the way systems drive behaviour to determine personal and organisational effectiveness and results. And to shape attitudes and corporate culture.

Adapted from an unknown Internet source