

# The Raffles Review

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## A Nudge or a Wink: Comply, or else?



### SOURCE

“Getting People to Behave: Research Lessons for Policy Makers” by R. Kent Weaver was published, as an ‘early view article’, in *Public Administration Review*, on 14 July 2015.

### BIG IDEAS

- Government policies achieve their intended objectives only if individuals and businesses comply.
- Key barriers to compliance include:
  - Insufficient incentives, monitoring and enforcement for implementation,
  - Lack of information / cognition, impact of beliefs and a peer-effect among targets, and
  - Want of resources or autonomy to comply among target groups.
- When compliance with public policy is low, it is often because target populations face multiple barriers to compliance.
- Potential barriers to compliance with public policies can and should be anticipated during the design and implementation phases.
- Effective policies typically use a number of interlinked strategies, like lowering the costs of compliance and using leverage points, as well as long term, multi-phase strategies to achieve these objectives.
- Widespread failures of compliance may indicate that there is something wrong with the policy itself, rather than with the targets who appear uncooperative by failing to comply.

### IMPLICATIONS FOR PUBLIC SERVICE

- Public servants who design policies to “get people to behave” in a particular way and those who administer those policies must take into account a more comprehensive set of barriers to behaviour change and compliance.
- Public services should link strategies for obtaining better compliance with the underlying reasons for non-compliance. For instance, increasing incentives for systematic monitoring and enforcement by public servants could ensure more conducive responses.
- Target groups are not homogenous and strategies that seek compliance from the model group will work for everyone.
- Adherence or compliance to government policy should be made easier and less costly.
- Campaigns on mass media often have limitations that public servants ought to recognise and recalibrate the message accordingly. E.g. in the health sector, disease or infection management

might be better served by ensuring compliance to ‘prevention behaviours’ rather than ‘detection behaviours’.

- Public servants should ensure that campaign resources are not spread too thinly with the aim of targeting absolutely everyone, and instead could be better focussed on achieving compliance of “mission critical” populations.

- Policymakers must not assume that they know best, that they possess all the relative information, and that the policy they have developed is the best option, given numerous constraints, including political constraints.

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service matters to challenge  
assumptions and question  
the status quo.*