Ways to increase compliance with rules and expectations
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We will examine…
Some of the major reasons that we routinely violate a number of rules, including:
- The importance of the “holy trinity” of rule following (knowledge, skills, motivation)
- The importance of the contingencies that are specified by the rule
Overview

- The extent to which rules specify observable, measureable behavior and whether the rules are prescriptive or proscriptive in nature
- The role of suppressive repertoires in rule following
- The presence of the rule itself (the words) or of rule-specifying stimuli
- The role of support repertoires that increase the chances of control by rules or rule-specifying stimuli

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The extent to which (aversive) consequences have been demonstrated to suppress specific behavior that violates a rule

The extent to which (reinforcing) consequences have been demonstrated to strengthen specific rule following behavior

The extent to which consequences are quickly and reliably produced by both rule violation and rule adherence
The extent to which the rule specifies the commission of behaviors that will reduce the probability of the problem behavior for which the rule was initially created, i.e., the rule contain a replacement behavior.

Competing reinforcers for behaviors that violate the rule (they compete with reinforcers for following the rule).

Whether or not the rule is violated through commission or omission of behavior. Did someone violate the rule by doing something wrong or by failing to do something appropriate?
The holy trinity of rule following

- Knowledge
- Skills
- Motivation
The holy trinity of rule following:

Knowledge

- This is what most people tend to spend time on, ensuring that the individual “knows” the rule.
- Usually if the person can state the rule when asked then we say that the person “knows” the rule.
- For persons who possess a wide range of skills and who are properly motivated to follow rules in general, knowledge is all that is necessary.
The holy trinity of rule following: Knowledge

- Unfortunately, for persons with special needs and/or typically developing individuals with problem behavior, knowledge is typically the least important factor.
- In fact, if contingencies of reinforcement and punishment are "rock solid" then "knowledge" of the rule may be completely irrelevant.
The holy trinity of rule following: Knowledge

- It’s important to understand that rules can be thought of as what Skinner referred to as “contingency-specifying stimuli.”
- Sometimes we give people rules because it will save them the heartache of actually contacting a nasty contingency, e.g., “Always wear safety goggles when using power tools”
- However, the behavior of putting on one’s goggles can be reinforced using contrived reinforcers (praise), and operating power tools without them can punished using contrived punishers (a scolding) as you wouldn’t want the naturally occurring punisher to occur (the loss of one’s eye).
If these power tool contingencies are very “tight” you will get behavior change that looks like rule following even if the person cannot state the rule.

Many people learn very complex sets of skills that shaped by natural contingencies, yet those same individuals may be hard pressed to extract rules that describe their behavior from one moment to the next.
The holy trinity of rule following: Knowledge

- So, the ability to state a rule may not be nearly as important as people believe.
- Furthermore, persons with poor or no verbal skills can still be taught to behave consistently with a rule even though they lack the ability to state the rule because their behavior can be shaped by contingencies of reinforcement and punishment.
Rule “knowledge” is typically (highly) overrated in terms of reliably producing rule-following behavior.
Some rules don’t require highly specific skill sets or multiple skill sets to produce rule following, but others may.

If the rule is “Always sit down while eating” then you only have to know how to sit (pretty easy) and how to eat.

If the rule is “Always put on your raincoat if it looks like rain” then you have to know how to find your raincoat, how to put it on and how to determine if the weather looks threatening or not. That is, this rule may require some fine discriminations in weather conditions.
Some rules, especially those that are *proscriptive* in nature (only say what not to do) may require VERY well developed “self-control” repertoires.

“Keep your hand to yourself” doesn’t actually specify the exact behavior to engage in, it’s really a nice way of saying “don’t hit, don’t shove, don’t touch others, don’t pick up objects that aren’t yours,” etc.
The holy trinity of rule following: Skills

- If James shoves Billy very hard, it may be very difficult for James to refrain from shoving back.
- Most of us have well developed self-control repertoires consisting of dozens of different behaviors, all of which have the net result of helping us avoid doing the wrong thing and getting into trouble.
- What if you don’t have ANY of those skills? Are the rules “No shoving!” or “Keep your hands to yourself” or “Always be respectful” going to prevent aggression? Even if the individual can quickly and easily state the rule?
When constructing rules, it’s a good idea to ask yourself “Which skills does this person need to demonstrate (fluently) to be able to comply with the rule?

Remember, some rules may require very basic and/or few skills and some may require multiple advanced skills.

If you don’t sit down (or stand up) and think about which skills a particular rule requires, you may never get rule-following behavior.
The holy trinity of rule following: Motivation

- Okay, so you’ve got your knowledge (you can say the rule when asked) and you’ve got mad skills (as they relate to the rule). Why the hell should you follow the rule?
- Motivation!
- The motivation for rule-following must be reasonably **high**, AND the motivation for ignoring the rule must be reasonably **low**.
Keep on Truckin’
Trey the Trucker

- The speed limit is 70
- Trey the Trucker knows the speed limit (knowledge)
- Trey the Trucker knows how to make the truck slow down and speed up (skills)
- Trey the Trucker currently has no speeding tickets in the last 5 years, but is late for a delivery and will lose 500 dollars if the shipment doesn’t arrive on time (motivation)
- What is the probability of rule following (obeying the speed limit) for Trey?
The speed limit is still 70
Like Trey, Trent the Trucker knows the speed limit (knowledge)
Like Trey, Trent the Trucker knows how to make the truck slow down and speed up (skills)
Unlike Trey, Trent the Trucker has one recent speeding ticket and works for UPS where the exact time of delivery doesn’t matter. Also, UPS will fire drivers with two or more speeding tickets in a one-year period. Finally, UPS awards year-end bonuses for safe driving (motivation for avoiding tickets)
What is the probability of rule-following for Trent?
For our Trucker friend Trent, he is not only motivated by avoiding bad things (being fired for speeding) but he is ALSO motivated by a potential gain in reinforcement (bonuses) for staying within the speed limit.

Can you see how motivation can easily trump knowledge?

It may not, however, trump skills. No matter how much you wish to follow the rule, if you don’t have the requisite skills you won’t be successful.
No!

Now that you understand the importance of the holy trinity of rule-following, let’s look at some other variables in detail to see how they also affect rule-following.
Many rules can be vague such as “be respectful” or “mind your manners” or the ever popular “quiet hands”.

If you do not give specific examples of behaviors that fall under the category of “respectful” then the rule is essentially useless.

Being respectful is not simply the absence of cursing. Some individuals will get a “check” for the half-hour interval they were being observed as long as they didn’t call anyone names, but perhaps no one was bothering them. Was the individual truly respectful or was he just left alone by his peers?
Does the rule specify observable behavior?
If an individual has a wealth of “self-control” skills then perhaps a rule like “Stay out of trouble” (which implies a contingency but doesn’t clearly state it) might eliminate unwanted behavior.

But don’t count on it!
PRESCRIPTIVE RULES: What you should do
PROSCRIPTIVE RULES: What you should NOT do

It is far easier to specify observable behavior in the case of prescriptive rules, those that specify which behavior should be displayed

“Keep your hands to yourself” or the ever-popular “quiet-hands” are actually proscriptive rules masquerading as prescriptive rules

That is, it sounds like you’re telling the individual what to do, but you’re actually warning them to avoid engaging in certain behaviors (shoving, hitting, touching what isn’t yours, etc.)
Does the rule specify observable behavior?

Santa Claus is Coming to town gives proscriptive rules

You better watch out (promotes paranoia in children and encourages avoidance behaviors)

You better not cry (proscriptive rule)

You better not pout (proscriptive rule)

The implied contingency is that you ain’t gettin’ $$&*! for Christmas
To the greatest extent possible, we should be striving to create prescriptive rules anytime we are tempted to create proscriptive rules. These kinds of rules often take more analysis and careful consideration of the skills necessary to minimize the chances of problem behavior, which is why so many people lean towards rules that are proscriptive in nature.
Whenever possible, try to turn proscriptive rules into prescriptive rules whenever you can:

- No hitting!--Think before you hurt someone and call an adult for help!
- No shouting!--Please whisper
- Don’t touch the property of others!--Ask permission from the owner if you want to touch something
Does the rule specify observable behavior?

- Turn *vague* prescriptive rules into multiple clearer mini-rules
- Be respectful! This appears to be specifying behavior, but which behaviors do we label as “respectful?” If you don’t know, then why would the individual know?
- If everyone can easily rattle off those behaviors deemed to be “respectful” then a reminder to be respectful to others may be sufficient.
“Be respectful” could be broken down like this:

- Call people by the name they like to be called by
- Speak after the other person is done talking
- If you want someone to stop something that is bothering you, start off with “Could you please…”
- If you think someone is wrong about what they said, say “I disagree, and here’s why”
Sure this is much more trouble than just telling people “be respectful” but it’s also much clearer. Eventually, once everyone knows the handful of “mini-rules” then you can just abbreviate the whole thing with “Remember to be respectful”
Does the rule specify only behavior or the consequences as well?

CONSEQUENCES
You have 4.2 seconds to remove this from my head, or they shall be dire.

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In many instances, consequences are implied or not specified at all.

For example, the rule might be “no hitting.”

Even if the rule is prescriptive in nature, e.g., “Call an adult when someone is mean to you” it does not specify a clear contingency, only the behavior that is expected.

It may be necessary to state clear consequences for following the rule or violating the rule.

Unfortunately, far too many rules either imply or specify a punishing consequence for rule violation instead of specifying a reinforcing consequence for following the rule.
Does the rule specify only behavior or the consequences as well?

- Why is knowledge of the consequences necessary, and why do the reinforcing consequences need to be arranged and stated?
- This brings us to the next variable that affects rule-following and that is whether the stated consequences are functional reinforcers or punishers in relation to the behaviors of interest.
Consequences for rule-following and rule violation

- If an individual demonstrates generalized rule following, then you don’t need to specify ANY consequences, only the rule.
- For example, if you get a rule from someone you highly respect, there is a good chance you will follow the rule without even asking why it should be followed.
- This will tend to be more true for individuals who have contacted numerous reinforcing consequences for rule following and numerous aversive consequences for failure to follow a rule.
If you don’t show generalized rule following then you probably want to examine the alleged programmed punishers and reinforcers to see if they will be functional for the individual
Charles: “Hey Kate, what is fine for hitting?”
Kate: “1000 points”
Charles: “How many points do I have now?”
Kate: “10,000! You’ve been awesome!”
Charles: “Thanks!” (Immediately punches another student in the arm as hard as he can)
In the case of Charles, there was a clear consequence for rule violation, but the consequence is (currently) not a very effective one. Furthermore, there is no rule that specifies what Charles should do instead of retaliatory aggression (prescriptive rule) and there is no statement about reinforcing consequences for solving problems peacefully.
Consequences for rule-following and rule violation

- For example, there could have been a prescriptive rule that also contained a (potentially) reinforcing consequence.

- If someone cuts in front of you in line, and you choose to call an adult to help resolve the problem, you can earn lunch off-campus with your favorite teacher!

- This rule’s a bit long, true, but it not only specifies the behavior to be shown and the reinforcing consequence, but also touches on the motivation for aggression (line cutting, which everyone hates!)
Consequences for rule-following and rule violation

- If you cover all your bases, prescriptive rules, meaningful consequences (both reinforcing and if necessary punishing consequences) and the motivation for misbehavior (someone shoves you) you can greatly increase the chances of rule following.
Consequences: Make them swift, Make them reliable, or don’t even bother!

Yes, I mean reinforcing consequences too!
Consequences: Make them swift, Make them reliable, or don’t even bother!

- When driving, we all speed
- All of us
- Yes even you
- What would stop this egregious behavior dead in it’s tracks?
- 1. A GPS device in your car calculates your speed against the posted speed limit in your current location
Consequences: Make them swift, Make them reliable, or don’t even bother!

- 2. If your speed exceeds that limit by even one mile per hour a ticket will IMMEDIATELY spit out of a printer on your dashboard
- 3. Money will INSTANTLY be deducted from your checking account
- 4. Points will INSTANTLY be applied to your driver’s license

Who will still be speeding now?

That’s what I thought
Consequences: Make them swift, Make them reliable, or don’t even bother!

- In this case the rule is proscriptive in nature (don’t drive faster than X) and there is no reinforcement for adhering to the rule, nonetheless you will probably get very good rule following, much better than exists currently for speeding.
- No one says that all rules must always be prescriptive in nature as sometimes that may not be practical, but if they are proscriptive make certain that consequences are immediate, reliable, and meaningful!
Can you eventually switch to an intermittent schedule of reinforcement and/or punishment and still maintain rule following?

Sure, but remember when the consequence does occur it must immediately follow the behavior. Even an intermittent schedule of reinforcement/punishment can still be reliable. That is, even if you got a ticket for every 5 times you speed, you’ll still probably stop speeding.

You can even use conditioned reinforcers for demonstrated rule following (praise, gold stars, coupons, etc.) that can add up to be exchanged for the primary (backup) reinforcer.
The role of suppressive repertoires

Temptation
Do you really want to spend the rest of your life wondering...
For those rules that are more proscriptive in nature (no hitting, no running, no shouting, no cat microwaving, etc.) individuals need a suppressive repertoire

This repertoire is comprised a variety of behaviors all aimed at “keeping us out of trouble”

If I’m faced with a situation where I know that I must not speak until it’s my turn, (testifying in court for example) I will take a deep breath and blow it out slowly and then write down what I wanted to say so the motivation to speak out of turn decreases somewhat
All of us do a variety of things (behaviors) that keep us out of trouble when we really want to do something bad. If the individual is in possession of such skills (biting your tongue, using curse word replacements, looking down, deep breathing, sitting down to make relaxing easier, repeating to yourself “the best revenge is living well” etc.) then there is a better chance of following proscriptive rules.
The role of suppressive repertoires

- If individuals lack the skills of self-calming, it makes behavioral omission that much harder to do, especially when no one tells them exactly what they should do instead of the bad behavior.
- If individuals have a rich and varied self-calming repertoire then they can choose different behaviors to engage in to keep from violating various proscriptive rules.
- The more varied the repertoire and the more fluent the individual the more vague you can make the rule.
- Don’t be a total screw up!
- If I know what a total screw up is, and I know 12 ways to avoid being a total screw up, then it’s possible that I only need that rule and nothing else.
The role of suppressive repertoires

- If the rule specifies the commission of behavior (something you should do) then this is not necessarily affected by self-control skills if the rule doesn’t have anything to do with problem behavior.
- Rules like “remember to carry the one” or “I before E except after C” are probably affected less by competing motivators than rules like “no shoving!”
- For rules of commission you might focus more on how to remember the rule and knowing when the rule does and doesn’t apply.
What else may affect rule following?

I will follow the rules
I will follow the rules
I will follow the rules
I will follow the rules
I will fol
Rule support repertoires

These are some things that people can learn to do that may 1) increase the chances of remembering the rule at a time when they need to follow it and 2) bring our behavior under the control of stimuli/conditions that are described by the rule.

Even if I know the rule is “Don’t Speed” and I’m thinking about the rule, I can’t obey the speed limit if I don’t know what it is!

I can learn to scan the road every few minutes looking for posted speed limit signs.

I can set my gps to give an audible warning any time I’m exceeding the speed limit by 5mph or more.
What else may affect rule following?

- I can review the rules (that I have written down) just before I’m about to go into a situation where I may need to follow them.
- I can post the rules in a place where I am likely to see them frequently.
- If someone has trouble remembering to raise his hand before speaking, he could put a sticker on the back of his hand with the rule written on it.
- If you’re properly motivated to follow the rule, but you get “caught up in the moment” then sometimes an additional stimulus may be all that you need.
What else may affect rule following?

- Use fewer rules that address the most important problems
- It’s generally easier to remember the rules if there aren’t so damn many of them!
- Start with the 3 big ones you want people to follow, preferably prescriptive rules
- If you can’t get people to follow 3 simple ones, what makes you think they will follow a dozen?
What else may affect rule following?

- Competing reinforcers and MOs that support rule violation!
- Like with our trucker friend Trey, there are most likely big-time motivators and reinforcers that precede and support behaviors that violate the rule
- If you understand the problem that keeps people from following the rule, you can focus on reducing the MO for rule violation and increasing the reinforcement for rule following
So, Alan whacks Jimmy in the head every time Jimmy calls him a name.
The rule is “Call an adult if someone is nasty to you.”
We find out the name that Alan finds the most offensive, and we role play and Alan gets big-time immediate reinforcement for “handling” the pretend name calling.
We get to the point that Alan can smile and say “Whatever dude” and remain calm.
We review the rule and the behaviors Alan should show just before going into the room with Jimmy

Alan has a copy of the rule (if you get called a name, smile, say “whatever dude” and go back to work) and knows the consequences for following the rule (10 extra minutes of computer time).

If Alan follows the rule, he is IMMEDIATELY allowed computer time (this may compete with the immediate satisfaction of whacking Jimmy)

Under these conditions, it’s not a guarantee naturally, but there’s a very good chance that Alan will do the right thing and follow the rule

Does this take a lot more work then just telling Alan “Be nice!”? Yes, but it’s also more likely to produce results
To Sum Up...
Rule knowledge is only one component of rule following and usually not the most important one, you need skills and motivation as well.

The contingencies that support rule following must be clear and reinforcing and aversive consequences must be meaningful.

Consequences must be swift and reliable.

Rules should (ideally) be prescriptive and specify observable behaviors.

Individuals may need a suppressive repertoire for proscriptive rules that specify the absence of behavior.
In Summary…

- The rule should be easy to access in the current environment.
- Address skills that support rule following (identifying situations where the rule should be used, keeping a copy of the rules nearby in plain sight, etc.).
- Prescriptive rules should (ideally) specify clear replacement behaviors.
- Competing MOs and reinforcers must be addressed.
In Summary...

- Now go forth and don’t be a total screw-up when you make rules!
- To be more prescriptive, please do what it says in slides 7 through 57
- Thank you!
- This webinar was recorded and you can email me for a link when it is fully uploaded and ready to go
- This PowerPoint presentation will be available tomorrow on the PCMA website under the “public downloads” section