

This is not a word-for-word transcript.

Neil

Hello. This is 6 Minute English from BBC Learning English. I'm Neil.

Beth

And I'm Beth.

Neil

Have you ever been sent a text reminding you about a doctor's appointment? Or impulsively bought something on the internet because there was "only one left"? If any of these have happened to you, then you've been nudged.

Beth

A **nudge** is a subtle way of altering human behaviour. It's a powerful way for governments, advertisers and social media companies to encourage, or nudge, people into making choices that benefit themselves and society as a whole.

Neil

Imagine the government want people to eat better. It might encourage supermarkets to put healthy snacks in easy-to-reach shelves near the checkout, and hide the chocolate bars out of sight on the top shelf. Shoppers are being nudged to eat better.

Beth

Well... that's the idea, anyway. But often nudging is used less to benefit society, and more to make money for big business. And it happens more often than people realise. So in this programme, we'll be asking whether the idea behind nudging -

to influence human behaviour for good - is still true today. And, as usual, we'll be learning some useful new vocabulary as well.

Neil

But first I have a question for you, Beth. Another example of nudging happened in Woolwich, an area of London which in 2011 had a problem with anti-social behaviour, and particularly with shop windows being smashed. The local authority decided to use nudging to fix the problem by painting pictures on the shop windows, but what did they paint? Was it:

- a) cute kittens?
- b) babies' faces? or,
- c) barking dogs?

Beth

I guess barking dogs would keep the window breakers away.

Neil

OK, Beth, I'll reveal the correct answer later in the programme. Nudging started in 2008 with the publication of a book by Nobel Prize winning economist, Professor Richard Thaler.

Beth

Professor Thaler's ideas about how to gently persuade people into making good decisions became known as 'nudge theory'. Advertising executive, Rory Sutherland, introduced nudge theory to his agency, Ogilvy. Here's Rory explaining more to BBC Radio 4 programme, Analysis:

Rory Sutherland

Let's say you make the **profitable** option button green and highly attractive, the less profitable option, you make it kind of grey, and kind of **manky** looking, okay... That would be an example of something which is, you know, a nudge not necessarily used **in the best interests** of the consumer.

Neil

Advertisers use colours to nudge customers towards the **profitable** option, the one which is most likely to make money. These appear brightly coloured and attractive on the screen, whereas less profitable options are made to look **manky**, a slang word meaning dirty and unattractive.

Beth

Here, nudging isn't being used for the public good. These 'dark nudges', also called 'sludge', make money for a company, but are not always **in the best interests** of the consumer. If something is **in your best interests**, it's the most advantageous and beneficial thing for you to do.

Neil

Dark nudges have caused many to question the morality of nudging, including Neil Levy, professor of ethics at Oxford University, speaking here to BBC Radio 4 programme, Analysis:

Professor Neil Levy

The big one, the one people have concentrated on, is that it's **paternalistic** - that is that nudge might be in our interests but we want to make our own decisions. People worry that nudges **infantilize** us, it's undermining our **autonomy**.

Beth

Critics of nudging call it **paternalistic**, meaning it wants to make decisions for people, rather than letting them take responsibility for themselves. They also claim nudging **infantilizes** people, it treats them like children, and, as a result, people lose **autonomy**, the ability to make your own decisions about what to do, rather than being told by someone else.

Neil

I guess nudging itself is neither good nor bad, it just depends how you use it.

Beth

Well, let's look on the positive side by revealing the answer to your question, Neil.

Neil

Right, I asked you how authorities in Woolwich, in south-east London, nudged anti-social window breakers to behave nicely.

Beth

I guessed it was by painting pictures of scary barking dogs on the windows...

Neil

Which was... the wrong answer, I'm afraid, Beth! In fact, Woolwich council hired graffiti artists to paint pictures of local babies' faces onto the window shutters. Not even the most hard-hearted criminal smashed those windows, and anti-social behaviour fell by 18% in one year! OK, let's recap the vocabulary we've learned in this programme about **nudging**, ways of gently persuading or encouraging someone to take decisions.

Beth

Something which is **profitable** makes a profit, or is likely to make money.

Neil

Manky is slang for dirty and unattractive.

Beth

If something is **in your best interests**, it's the most advantageous, beneficial thing for you to do.

Neil

A **paternalistic** person prefers making decisions for other people, rather than letting them take responsibility for their own lives.

Beth

To **infantilize** someone means to treat them as if they were a child.

Neil

And finally, **autonomy** is the ability to make your own decisions about what to do, rather than being told by someone else. Once again our six minutes are up! Remember to join us again next time for more topical discussion and useful vocabulary, here at 6 Minute English. Goodbye for now!

Beth

Bye!

VOCABULARY

profitable

making (or likely to make) a profit; money-making

manky

(slang) dirty; filthy; unattractive; used up

in (someone's) best interests

the most advantageous, helpful and beneficial thing for someone

paternalistic

making decisions for other people, rather than letting them take responsibility for their own lives

infantilize

treat someone as if they were a child

autonomy

the ability to make your own decisions about what to do, rather than being influenced by someone else or told what to do