

Carrot or Stick? Both Work to Spur Cooperation

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If you want to encourage cooperation, do you break out the carrot or the stick? A new study finds that either should work: Rewarding good behavior is equally as effective as punishing bad.

"A shame tactic can be effective, but rather surprisingly, we've also found that apparently honor has an equally strong effect on encouraging people to [cooperate for the common good](#)," study researcher Christoph Hauert, a professor of mathematics at the University of British Columbia, said in a statement.

The results are important in an era when shame and honor are used to institute change in business and personal behavior, study researchers said. [Shame and honor](#) campaigns are common on social media sites, with users tipping hats and wagging fingers at companies, media outlets and other figures, said study author Jennifer Jacquet, a postdoctoral researcher at UBC. In government, some states post the names of tax delinquents online in an effort to shame them. And conservation campaigns often hinge on companies striving for the equivalent of gold stars, such as labels declaring their products "sustainable."

To measure the effects of shame and honor, the researchers started by giving 180 undergraduate students \$12 apiece. In groups of six, the volunteers played a game in which they had to decide 12 times whether to contribute a dollar to a public pot, the total of which would then be doubled and redistributed equally to all players, regardless of whether they'd contributed.

The temptation might be to freeload on other players, by keeping the original \$12 and raking in others' donations. But the researchers added a twist to some of the games: Players were told that at the end of 10 rounds, two of the six players would have to reveal their identities. In some games, the two most generous players would be revealed (and thus honored). In other games, the least generous players would be revealed (and thus shamed). [[Fight, Fight, Fight: The History of Human Aggression](#)]

Both the threat to shame and the promise of honor increased generosity by 50 percent, the researchers found. In those games, the public fund received \$33 on average, compared with \$22 in the no-shame, no-honor games.

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