

L. Taylor's review of *Fostering Sustainable Behavior* by Doug McKenzie-Mohr (former Prof. of Psychology at St. Thomas Univ., Canada). The subtitle describes the author's approach, *An Introduction to Community-Based Social Marketing*.

This is a handbook for those professionals whose task it is to design programs to change behaviors. The tool for change is a concept called Social Marketing and the behaviors up for change are sustainable living habits. A key point is that behavior change is most effective at the community level (peer pressure is a powerful tool).

The social marketing approach relies heavily on social psychology research and cites numerous examples of past successful and failed attempts to elicit behavior changes. **The most distressing conclusion in the book is the utter failure of information-based programs to elicit change.** The author presents study after study showing that well-meaning campaigns to educate and inform people about climate or sustainable issues had virtually NO effect on a targeted behavior. Why do so many campaigns fail to elicit any meaningful change? Obviously that information was the motivating factor for the author to develop the Social Marketing approach.

The book details a comprehensive process starting with how to select a credible behavior target, why the identification of the barriers and benefits of that change are critical to success, factors to consider in the design and implementation process and finally, how to evaluate the success/cost-effectiveness of the program.

In my opinion the usefulness of the social marketing approach for the Portola Valley Sustainability Committee is mixed. Most of the cited/described programs seem to be applicable for more populous/urban areas where large numbers can adopt a behavior change that has a significant impact. A key element in designing a successful program involves *social diffusion* which works best in situations where many people frequently observe other people exhibiting the desired behavior. It does not work well if the behavior is invisible or rare. Suburban neighbors can identify a water waster by their runoff; but how do you know who has installed energy efficient appliances?

Moreover, the research required by the Social Marketing approach before designing a program seems daunting and time consuming. The committee would have to be very focused on a single element that we identify as having the greatest impact and chance for success. Just doing the necessary research to identify that element will not be trivial. That said, there are several approaches/elements in the marketing scheme that are thought-provoking and potentially useful in getting our message across. I used myself as a target audience. I am pretty well-versed on the effects of climate change and sustainable living. While reading this book the element that elicited my strongest reaction was a campaign targeting consumptive lifestyles. All it took were 2 pictures: an American family standing on their front lawn with all their possessions displayed around them and a family from a developing country with all their possessions in front of their home. It was shocking. The message that we consume too much was stark.