

# Implement a Behavior Motivation System

## FROM EXTRINSIC TO INTRINSIC MOTIVATION

**Behavior Bucks** are simple extrinsic motivation tools to teach and encourage youth to make the right choices consistently. There is a prevailing philosophy that using extrinsic motivators (like stickers, allowance, points, rewards, a trip to the prize bag, etc.) teach young people that they should only do the right thing if there's a reward at the end of the line. Our experience is that young people will start out asking, "What's in it for me?" which is completely developmentally appropriate. It is our job to move them from needing these extrinsic motivators towards developing intrinsic motivators, such as their own interest, an internal goal they have set, a vision for the life they want to create or the person they choose to be. Developing young people's intrinsic motivation requires continuous skill building, and giving them the experience that doing the right thing feels right too. So we have to start somewhere. In a group environment, each individual

will be in a different place on their own pathway from extrinsic to internal motivators. Several students will be well on their way, and these are the ones who tend to be strong in group work, community building, and staying on task. And there will be others who are just beginning their journey, or barely on the path, who will need more guidance and structure to make the right choices. It doesn't help to single these students out to create a special motivation system just for them. I remember working with difficult students and offering up all kinds of privileges if they would just do the bare minimum to stay on task and not distract the other students. And this created a feeling in the group that this student was super needy, and sent a mixed message that the bar was lower for some students. So the point is to start the year with an incentive tool and work to develop intrinsic motivators over time.



## Implement a Behavior Motivation System, continued

There are many different behavior motivation tools in the world, but we love and recommend the use of behavior bucks, because:

- Young people understand that money is something they need to get other things they want—so they are **automatically incited** to earn bucks. Meeting them where they are makes creating buy in so much simpler
- Young people have seen adults keeping money in wallets or the bank—and so will feel **motivated** to keep the bucks they earn safe. This simplifies the process of having to track their bucks yourself.
- You can link the concept that being on task and behaving like a good community member is everyone's "job," which builds on an **economic metaphor** that automatically resonates for youth.

Here are 10 great ways to introduce, use and redeem behavior bucks:

### TEN WAYS TO USE BEHAVIOR BUCKS

1. Start out by **customizing a name** for your bucks, to strengthen the metaphor that youth earn bucks for a particular behavior. While you might want to create multiple categories of bucks later in the year it's a good idea to start out with just one to keep things simple in the beginning. When introducing the concept of bucks to your students reinforce to them the values of your collective community. Some organizations name their bucks after their school, and we believe this adds a layer of complexity because the name then no longer is a direct correlation to why they earn their bucks. Some categories we like are:
  - Community Bucks
  - Friendship Bucks
  - Sharing Bucks
  - Common Cents
2. **Introduce** the concept of bucks to your students, and ask them what kinds of behaviors they believe should earn bucks, or cost them bucks. Create a connection between their earning behaviors and the kind of environment you are creating in your program.
3. Start out **giving all youth 20 bucks**—this lets them all start out having something, so that all students feel like they can be successful
4. **Reinforce** the metaphor of bucks by doing a craft project with students to create wallets, a banking system, or a personal bank log where they can track the bucks they earn and lose.
5. If you're worried about students losing their bucks **collect** them at the end of each day/week, or have students write their names on their bucks and deposit their bucks in a "**community bank**." Assign the job of banker to a new student each week, who will count the bucks in the basket for each student, track their bucks in a Community Bank or large wall chart, and place the bucks of each student into a manila envelope with their name on it. Lock these real bucks in a filing cabinet with a drawer labeled "Community Vault."
6. Allow students to take a trip to the **community store** at a designated time each week. Stock the community store with low-priced essentials like pencils, notebooks, erasers, sharpeners, etc. (buy these in bulk at the beginning of the year when everything is on sale!), medium priced items and super expensive items that are in the \$100-\$150 range. This creates incentives for students to save their bucks, and earn often.
7. Buy your students a supply box or pencil case that they put their name on and turn in to you at the end of each day. **Distribute** bucks for organization of supplies—so you teach students to be prepared and organized with their materials. When students enter the store, make them show you their supply box, and re-stock any missing supplies first, before they can shop for other delectables.
8. The material prizes will be intriguing in the beginning, but will get old fast. **Change up** what



## Implement a Behavior Motivation System, continued

### TEN WAYS TO USE BEHAVIOR BUCKS, CONTINUED

your youth can buy, and start adding in special gift certificates for extra special treats, such as:

- Lunch with a teacher
- Extra yard time
- An ice-cream sundae party
- A special movie screening

9. As the year progresses, **create a market research team** of students to interview other students or conduct a survey to identify the satisfaction level of students with the store, the behavior bucks process, and other comments. Have this team report-out to the group, as a way to tie in economic connections of supply, demand and customer satisfaction.
10. **Hold an auction** four times in the year for students to bid on five super exciting things they really want. This will allow the students who are the highest earners to have something to look forward to, and give youth a chance to weigh how much they want something, by determining the auction price they are willing to pay.