

# GETTING YOUR FOOT IN THE DOOR

*The Social Psychology of Donating, Cutting Back, and Going Vegan*

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Foot-in-the-door theory is a social psychological concept utilized by salespersons, social movements, and others in the business of persuasion. If you succeed in convincing someone to make one small change, they will be more likely to accept larger requests in the future. The idea is that attitudes follow behaviors (not the other way around as we like to think.) For example, if you convince someone to put a sticker in their window supporting your cause, and you later ask them to put a sign in their yard or even to volunteer, you will be much more successful. The reason is that people will adjust their attitude to reflect their behavior. They supported your cause by putting your sticker in their window, now they feel more positive about that cause and they have become emotionally invested. Therefore, they will see further requests as congruent with their previous behavior and their changing attitude. These approaches allow people to believe they can do next to nothing and consider themselves someone who cares about Non-human Animals without ever being pushed to take that attitude seriously through veganism.

Ofentimes, the professionalized animal rights industry chooses to apply foot-in-the-door phenomenon to their pre-existing tactics that prioritize moderated strategy and fundraising. But could we not apply this theory more practically? Why not focus on those who have already gone vegetarian and ask them to go vegan? We might also ask those

who have gone vegan for health or environmental reasons to adopt an ethical stance as well. After all, the foot is already in the door, they've made a change. They should be receptive to further change.

This is one reason why many organizations rightly target college students—their foot is already in the door to liberal thinking. We might utilize foot-in-the-door theory when appealing to pre-existing attitudes about companion animals, human equality, and unnecessary suffering. Many people value egalitarianism and already think fondly of the cats and dogs in their life. These folks do not want Non-humans to suffer needlessly, and these mindsets are easy springboards into veganism.

Despite the potential for improving outreach effectiveness, many Non-human Animal rights organizations only use foot-in-the-door research to promote their status quo activism. They often claim that promoting vegetarianism and other forms of reduction is to break down a major change (veganism) into manageable chunks (cutting out flesh, or just flesh on Mondays, or perhaps eggs from caged birds). Once a person reduces their Non-human Animal consumption, that person's "foot is in the door" and they are expected to be more receptive to veganism. But why does applying this theory often entail compromising the interests of other animals?

And even more telling, there are very, very few campaigns that are explicitly promoting veganism. The foot gets in the door, and then what? The end goal seems to be reductionism, not veganism.

Why not have individuals sign up for a vegan mentoring program or a newsletter instead? Why not ask them to try veganism for a month, then follow up with them and ask them to extend the period? Alternatively, we might ask people to incrementally adopt veganism over a few weeks. We might also be honest about the learning process of veganism and reiterate that it is an inherently incremental process. It's impossible for anyone to go vegan overnight, for instance, because there is a learning curve in navigating a speciesist society. All of these approaches would be consistent with foot-in-the-door approach and seem infinitely more consistent with social justice efforts.

When organizations promote reductionism instead of veganism because "the world won't go vegan overnight," they're constructing a straw man argument. Very few advocates for any social change campaign honestly believe change would happen so quickly. Even violent revolutionary change requires significant planning and public support. But anti-speciesism is not based in violence. Anti-speciesism attacks ideological and structural inequalities. No one in the Non-human Animal rights movement is so naive to think the world is going to become vegan overnight. Vegan education is inherently incremental. It is an approach that will gradually gain momentum until a critical mass is reached. Dismantling the ideology of speciesism will be a process.

There is no compelling reason why foot-in-the-door theory could not speak to incremental abolitionist change. We should consider that the public looks to

the Non-human Animal rights movement as experts on the interests of Nonhuman Animals. If the public is being told that, at their own discretion, giving up some products some of the time is consistent with respecting the interests of other animals, how could we seriously expect meaningful change? When that movement is going so far as to reject vegan education (as oftentimes happens), we have a serious problem on our hands.

I suspect that organizations are utilizing foot-in-the-door theory to entice the public into making small, arbitrary behavior changes that will instill a pro-animal identity that should encourage them to donate. Meat-Out Monday makes as much sense as Gary Francione's satirical suggestion for "No Factory Farmed Small Fish Fridays." These requests are not consistent and they fall short. These approaches allow people believe they can do next to nothing and consider themselves someone who cares about Non-human Animals without ever being pushed to take that attitude seriously through veganism.

I suggest that the major organizations are not exactly utilizing foot-in-the-door theory to create a vegan world, but rather, they are utilizing the theory to solicit an ever-growing constituency of donors. Asking people to make trivial behavior changes gets people to see themselves as animal rights supporters. This, in turn, gets them to donate more. Asking people to go vegan, on the other hand, involves real change for the animals and circumvents the donation trap. Political power is within the individual, not their bank account. Most people truly care about animals, and, hence, already have their foot in the door. Why sell that short by encouraging reductionism instead of veganism? △