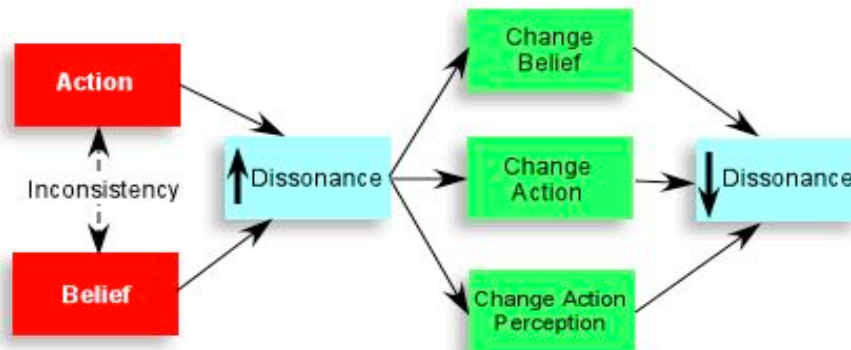




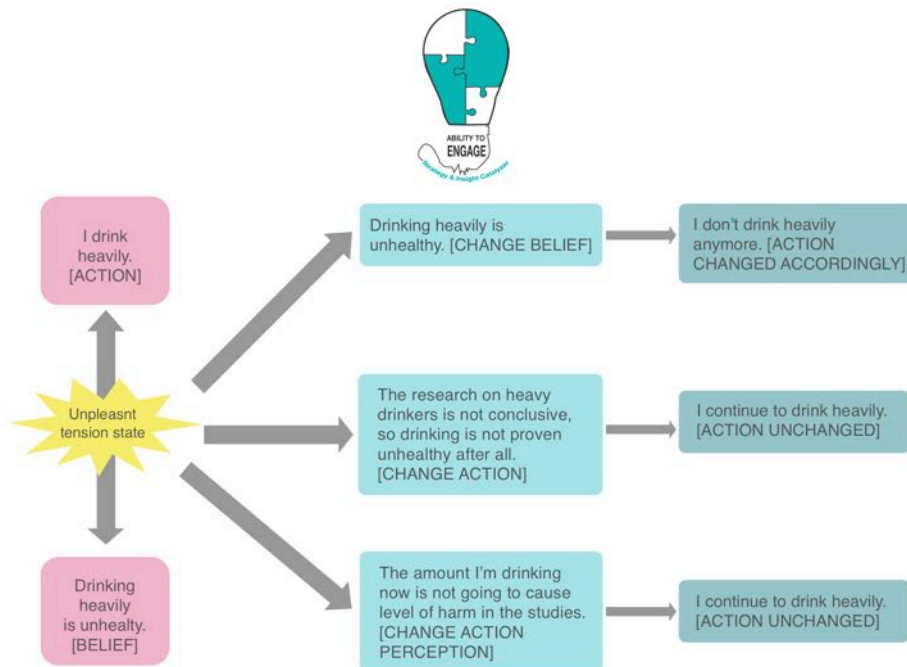
## Do it First (Act), Like it Later (Believe)



<https://sites.psu.edu/eganser/the-cognitive-dissonance-theory-and-its-function-in-public-relations/>

According to Dr. Leon Festinger at Stanford, cognitive dissonance arises when your beliefs or values don't match with your actions. The theory states that the person experiencing internal inconsistency tends to become psychologically uncomfortable, as shown in the above graph. In turn, this individual will attempt to reduce the tension he or she feels by aligning actions and beliefs in one of the three ways: *change belief*, *change action*, or *change action perception*, so that the actions and the beliefs are more aligned within the same individual. The above are three ways to dissolve the inconsistency—you only need one of them to make the tension go away. That's to say, the three pathways are parallel to each other, not in a sequential order. However, only one of the pathways is beneficial to us and can be made use to increase positive consumer perception.

For example, as shown in the graph below, if an individual drinks heavily and knows that drinking is unhealthy, the gap between his/her action and his/her belief will cause an unpleasant tension in this individual. As a result, the belief-action combination state is unstable and will not last long.



To solve this tension, the individual would have to

- 1) Change his/her action to not drink heavily
- 2) Change his/her belief to “heavy drinking is not unhealthy” or
- 3) See him/herself as a light drinker.

Among these three pathways, only a portion of those experiencing increased dissonance will end up changing their beliefs. However, those that do *change their beliefs based on their actions*, make for a powerful potential consumer target.

Wouldn't it be great to get your target audience to purchase your product within the first few seconds? To act now, reserving judgment and beliefs for later? It is possible, with understanding of what your consumers struggle with (what is the tension or conflict to be resolved?) and encouraging them to actively change their beliefs to match their action—thereby leveraging cognitive dissonance. It is human nature to want to solve internal conflicts and align beliefs with actions. *You can help your consumer make better sense of their world.*

Leveraging the theory of cognitive dissonance is also a great way to attract new consumers to a brand. To better illustrate this opportunity, let's walk through an example.

You drink coffee but are not a Starbucks fan. You find it overpriced. The other day, Starbucks ran a promotion, “Write a *Love Letter* to Starbucks for 50% off a drink!”



### A love letter to Starbucks

My darling, before I met you, I spent every available second in anxious contemplation of what was lacking in my life and why true happiness seemed to elude me. The moment you came to me and let me know that I could be energetic all day while tasting the greatest smoothness on earth, all my doubts and worries were driven away and I knew for a fact that I had found what I had been looking for all along.

Your appearance has made me realize what was the best drink that human species has to offer, and with that knowledge I knew that I would not ever be happy again without you.

I loved, love and will love you with all my heart. Will you give me this chance to prove that I love you wholeheartedly?

Yours truly,  
Rose

You wrote a letter, even though you do not love Starbucks. You want the promotion. This allows you to try Starbucks at a cheaper price, when price was your barrier to the brand. However, you now experience cognitive dissonance because a gap exists between your original belief of not liking Starbucks, as you believe it is overpriced, and your action of writing a love letter about the brand.

Based on cognitive dissonance theory, the gap between your actions and beliefs will decrease, because your brain wants your beliefs to be consistent with your actions. *By simply acting like you love Starbucks, you will start to believe that you love Starbucks.*

The result of this simple “love letter”? Consumers, that may not otherwise be Starbucks consumers, develop a more positive attitude towards the brand!

Now you may ask, how can we make *current* consumers more loyal? We can use our understanding of cognitive dissonance to help here, too.

For example, you can ask consumers who use your products but may have had an issue in the past and written a negative review about your product to participate in an activity helping to build the future of your brand or product. You can ask consumers to submit their vision for how the product may work better in the future, in exchange for a 50% off coupon for the product. Such an activity will induce “belief-action dissonance,” where consumers are not fully satisfied with the product, but act in a way that shows they believe the product is going to be better in the future. The dissonance is induced by having consumers perform a positive action when they have a negative belief.



Still not sure if cognitive dissonance is right for your brand? Ask yourself, what is the “worst-case” scenario—they don’t buy your product? Unfortunately, if they already had negative thoughts about your brand or product, they likely weren’t going to buy your product anyway. Inducing dissonance and creating a positive action will at least provide the chance of beliefs changing to align with actions over time, as *we all seek belief-action consonance*.

*Want to get your consumers to act first and believe later? Contact us to learn more about how you can apply cognitive dissonance theory to your business at [info@abilitytoengage.com](mailto:info@abilitytoengage.com) or follow us on Twitter [@AbilityToEngage](https://twitter.com/AbilityToEngage)*