Behavior and Attitudes

Further studies—more than 700 studies with 276,000 participants—confirmed that specific, relevant attitudes do predict intended and actual behavior (Armitage & Conner, 2001; Six & Eckes, 1996; Wallace & others, 2005). For example, attitudes toward condoms strongly predict condom use (Albarracin & others, 2001). And attitudes toward recycling (but not general attitudes toward environmental issues) predict participation in recycling (Oskamp, 1991). To change habits through persuasion, we had best alter people's attitudes toward specific practices.

So far we have seen two conditions under which attitudes will predict behavior: (1) when we minimize other influences upon our attitude statements and on our behavior, and (2) when the attitude is specifically relevant to the observed behavior. There is a third condition: An attitude predicts behavior better when the attitude is potent.