



IN PRACTICE
*Lessons for
and from
Practitioners*

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Crafting Messages That Stick: GIFs and Memes as Tools for Engagement

Dina Israel and Elena Serna-Wallender

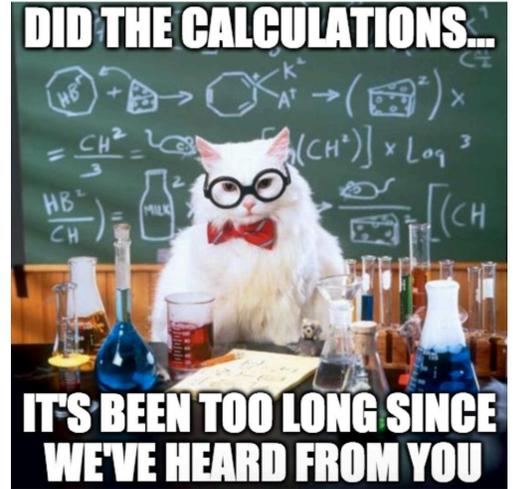
If you are a program operator, you may ask yourself, “How do I engage participants who stop attending services or are at risk of dropping out?” There is no standard answer. Tools for engaging participants can be as varied as the individuals that make up a target population. Programs can use many types of media – and a range of tones and styles – to reach their constituents and keep them engaged.

A MEME FOR EVERY OCCASION

According to MDRC field liaisons, one way program staffers might reconnect with participants is by texting memes. In this example, MDRC partner, [The Parenting Center](#), in Fort Worth, Texas, showcased a humorous meme to encourage participants to get back in touch:

Staff members said these types of memes not only grab attention and keep the conversation fun, they help communicate vital information about workshops and program activities. The Parenting Center has also used memes to do the following:

- Feature holiday themes
- Welcome a new participant
- Send reminders about an upcoming class
- Advertise special support services such as food or child care
- Encourage participants to reengage because they have been missed (see below)



RECURRING THEMES: CONNECTING ACTIONS TO REWARDS

For some programs, participants are required to complete a series of activities over time. This makes issuing effective reminders essential to accomplishing broader goals.

[MDRC studies of behavioral interventions](#) have found that action-oriented “nudges” can help improve attendance and other outcomes. Using memorable and fun media such as memes and Graphic Interchange Formats (GIFs) that appeal to a target population may help produce results and make key messages stick.

MDRC field liaisons point to the effectiveness of combining a savvy use of media with behavioral science principles to develop outreach strategies. For instance, a GIF combined with a memorable catchphrase can be embedded in reminders about routine tasks such as completing paperwork or

NEW YORK
200 Vesey Street
23rd Floor
New York, NY 10281
Tel: 212 532 3200

OAKLAND
475 14th Street
Suite 750
Oakland, CA 94612
Tel: 510 663 6372

WASHINGTON, DC
1990 M Street, NW
Suite 340
Washington, DC 20036

LOS ANGELES
11965 Venice Boulevard
Suite 402
Los Angeles, CA 90066

www.mdrc.org



submitting data. One common challenge is motivating staff members to complete weekly surveys about their work activities. Reminder texts or emails can be helpful, as can small incentives. We might use a catchphrase like “Give 5, Get \$5,” asking staff to complete the survey in exchange for a \$5 gift certificate. A humorous GIF like this one, can help:



This theme can be reiterated in mailings, flyers, phone reminders, and email messages such as this example, which is illustrated with call outs to the catchphrase:

To: Program Staffers
From: The MDRC Evaluation Team
Date: June 15, 2019
RE: Remember to fill out your survey so you can **Give 5, Get \$5!**

Dear staff members,

You have until midnight to complete our program survey. So, **Give 5, Get \$5.** Once you send in your survey, you will receive a \$5 gift card to some of your favorite vendors!

This week’s survey is a checklist log. You can access and complete the log in just five easy steps:

1. **Give 5:** Log on to take your survey by [clicking here to start.](#)
2. Enter your staff ID.
3. Begin your checklist log.
4. Press submit to send.
5. **Get \$5!** Your electronic gift certificate will arrive within the hour.

Thank you for your help! Reach out if you have questions.

The MDRC Evaluation Team

Catchphrases can borrow from a range of sources or cater to a specific local interest. They might evoke a common cultural reference from YouTube, television shows, movies, popular music, or advertisements. Young people may be especially susceptible to pop culture references in Super Bowl ads, or viral videos.

HOW DID PEOPLE RESPOND?

Holiday memes from The Parenting Center were very well received. Participants were honored that program staff members remembered their families during the holiday season. They also appreciated the brief and personalized words of encouragement that staff members sent with these memes.

In addition, MDRC's Evaluation Team found that catchphrases coupled with a GIF went over well with program staffers during training sessions. Staff members routinely chuckled at clever catchphrases, and it seems the messages stuck: Hundreds of staffers fully embraced the opportunity to participate.