



WORDS AND THEIR STORIES

Does the 'Carrot-and-Stick' Approach Come From Donkeys?

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And now, *Words and Their Stories*, from VOA Learning English.

There are many ways to get people to do what you want. You can threaten them with punishment. You can also **entice** others with a **reward**. In other words, they will get something in return for some effort or service.

Naturally, you can also just ask nicely. But for now, we will talk about threatening and enticing – two effective, but different methods of persuasion.

First, let's talk about these important words. When we *persuade* someone, we try to make them do something.

We can *entice* them or offer them something very desirable. We can also make *threats* or promise harm.

Sometimes we do both. One way of saying this is what we call “the **carrot-and-stick approach**.” You can say it is a method of persuasion that involves both a reward and punishment.

When given a choice, most people will surely take the carrot, a popular vegetable, instead of the stick, which could hurt.

For example, let's say a company has a carrot-and-stick approach to vacation days. They entice people to work hard by giving lots of time for paid vacations. (That is the carrot.) But they also threaten to take away those hours if employees refuse to work hard. (That is the punishment, or stick. When we say “stick” we don't mean giving a stick. We mean *hitting* with a stick!)

This kind of system may work well for some workers but not for others. It depends on what **motivates** you. Do you like your work? In addition to getting paid, what satisfaction do you get from the job? Or are you only working for a **paycheck**?

When using the carrot-and-stick method, it is also important to carefully consider the reward and punishment. If you do not want the carrot, you are not going to be motivated to do the work. Also, if the punishment is meaningless to you, it will not motivate you either.

Many word historians say the **origin** of the expression carrot-and-stick approach is unclear. But some say it comes from the custom of urging a donkey to move forward by hanging a carrot in front of it. If it refuses to move, the caretaker might decide to hit the animal with a stick.

Here is another example.

*The parents tried using a carrot-and-stick approach with their **teenage** daughter. They promised her a new phone if she brought up her **grades** and threatened to take away her current phone if her grades dropped even lower.*

When it comes to learning English, a carrot-and-stick approach is not a good motivational tool. We here at VOA Learning English can only reward you with praise. And we promise not to punish you...nor would we want to. So, I think the only thing we are giving out here is carrots!

And that is *Words and Their Stories* for this week.

Until next time ... I'm Anna Matteo!

Anna Matteo wrote this story for VOA Learning English. George Grow was the editor.

Words in This Story

entice – v. to attract (someone) especially by offering or showing something that is appealing, interesting, etc.

reward – *v.* to give money or another kind of payment to (someone or something) for something good that has been done – *n.* money or another kind of payment that is given or received for something that has been done or that is offered for something that might be done

motivate – *v.* to give (someone) a reason for doing something

paycheck – *n.* a check in payment of wages or salary

origin – *n.* the point or place where something begins or is created : the source or cause of something

teenage – *adj.* between 13 and 19 years old : relating to people who are between 13 and 19 years old

grade – *n.* a number or letter that indicates how a student performed in a class or on a test
