Why the Aversion?

Dear Drs Doolittle and Ellman,

With such an intentionally provocative title I was drawn to your recent short piece, "Sarah Palin Is My Muse—And Other Lessons Learned From a Sabbatical."[1] I, like most, can behave irrationally and can engage in loss aversion, and I am delighted that your goals were accomplished.

I am keen to know more about the "stick" used to persuade you to accomplish your goals. Specifically, I am curious to know whether the aversion you associated with donating $50 relates to Sarah Palin and the National Rifle Association as political entities; or does the aversion relate to "the real and virtual mailboxes filled with solicitations and a lifelong onslaught of e-mails"; or does the aversion relate only to the amount of money lost?

In short, would you expect similar results if your stick involved a monthly donation to Elizabeth Warren and MoveOn.org?

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References

1. Doolittle BR, Ellman MS. Sarah Palin is my muse—and other lessons learned from a sabbatical. *J Grad Med Educ*. 2016;8(5):792.

Authors' Reply to "Why the Aversion?"

We are grateful to Dr Lee for his insightful analysis of the "stick" in our sabbatical risk aversion experiment. Indeed, our *stick* contains 3 deterrents—the absolute sum of money donated, its destination, and future fallout. While we do not claim expertise in the psychology of risk aversion, we believe that our *stick* perfectly blended these 3 deterrents to serve up just enough, but not too much, aversion.

There is a fourth element, which is perhaps most essential: accountability to one another. We met monthly throughout our sabbatical, and held each other responsible to our goals. While our *stick* was somewhat tongue in cheek, to fail simply was not an option. The teasing to follow would have been insufferable.

Academic projects are difficult to complete for clinician-educator types. We were given a sabbatical to deepen our skills, and we did not wish to squander it.

Bottom line: *sticks* are highly personal. For those courageous (or desperate?) enough to try this technique, we can only advise a good "sabbatical buddy," and the careful scrutiny of soul and wallet.

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