

LISTENING EXERCISES – Week 9

4 READING & LISTENING

- a Look at the title of the article and the photos. What do you think the 'bagel test' is?
- b Read the article and check. Then in pairs say what you can remember about...
- 1 Paul Feldman's original job
 - 2 the incident that made him decide to change his job
 - 3 how the 'bagel habit' started, and what it consisted of
 - 4 why he started asking for money, and the proportion of people who paid
 - 5 his friends' and family's reaction to his change of job.
 - 6 how his business progressed
 - 7 the economic experiment he had (unintentionally) designed
- c You are going to hear an American economist talking about Paul Feldman's experiment. Before you listen, in pairs, predict the answers to the questions:
- 1 What was the average payment rate?
a 70%–80% b 80%–90% c 90%–100%
 - 2 Were smaller offices more or less honest than big ones?
 - 3 How often has the cash box been stolen?
 - 4 Did people 'cheat' more during good or bad weather?
 - 5 Did people 'cheat' more or less at Christmas? Why?
 - 6 Who cheated more, executives or lower status employees?
- d 56))) Listen and check your answers to c.
- e Listen again and choose a, b, or c.
- 1 More people paid in Feldman's own office...
a after he had caught somebody stealing
b because he asked them personally for the money
c because the workers were his colleagues
 - 2 Feldman eventually stopped selling bagels to...
a a company where less than 80% paid for their bagels
b a company where the money box got stolen
c a company where less than 90% paid for their bagels
 - 3 People are more honest in smaller companies because...
a they are more likely to get caught
b they would be more embarrassed about being caught
c there is more control over what goes on
 - 4 People 'cheat' more...
a after a day off
b before all public holidays
c before some public holidays
 - 5 Which of these people is most likely to pay?
a an administrative worker who doesn't like his boss
b an executive who is very popular with his staff
c an employee who likes the company where he works
- f If Feldman left a basket of bagels in your school or work place, what proportion do you think would pay?

What The Bagel Man Saw

Would you pass the bagel test?

Once upon a time, Paul Feldman dreamed big dreams. While studying agricultural economics at Cornell, he wanted to end world hunger. Instead, he ended up taking a job with a research institute in Washington, analysing the weapons expenditures of the United States Navy. He was well paid and unfulfilled. 'I'd go to the office Christmas party, and people would introduce me to their wives or husbands as the guy who brings in the bagels,' he says. "Oh! You're the guy who brings in the bagels!" Nobody ever said, "This is the guy in charge of the public research group."

The bagels had begun as a casual gesture: a boss treating his employees whenever they won a new research contract. Then he made it a habit. Every Friday, he would bring half a dozen bagels, a serrated knife, some cream cheese. When employees from neighbouring floors heard about the bagels, they wanted some, too. Eventually he was bringing in 15 dozen bagels a week. He set out a cash basket to recoup his costs. His collection rate was about 95 per cent; he attributed the underpayment to oversight.

In 1984, when his research institute fell under new management, Feldman said to management: 'I'm getting out of this. I'm going to sell bagels.'

His economist friends thought he had lost his mind. But his wife supported his decision. Driving around the office parks that encircle Washington, he solicited customers with a simple pitch: early in the morning, he would deliver some bagels and a cash basket to a company's snack room; he would return before lunch to pick up the money and the leftovers. Within a few years, he was delivering 700 dozen bagels a week to 140 companies and earning as much as he had ever made as a research analyst.

He had also – quite without meaning to – designed a beautiful economic experiment. By measuring the money collected against the bagels taken, he could tell, down to the penny, just how honest his customers were. Did they steal from him? If so, what were the characteristics of a company that stole versus a company that did not? Under what circumstances did people tend to steal more, or less?

