

DISPATCHESTM

Insights On Brand Development From The Marketing Front

Sunday, November 4, 2007

MAKE YOURSELF UNCOMFORTABLE

It's time to write the weekly DISPATCHES email article. You'd be surprised by how quickly this time comes around. It screams for attention at a time when so many urgent business matters beckon. First comes the selection of a topic. Then comes the writing itself. It won't happen unless we sit in front of the computer and like the Nike key copy words, "Just do it." So, it's time to make myself uncomfortable. Yes, you read this correctly. It's time to make myself *uncomfortable*.

Whenever we have to create something new, start from scratch or venture into the unknown we are leaving our comfort zone. A blank piece of paper, lack of a clear roadmap and ambiguity can be most uncomfortable. Wouldn't you agree? We experience this whenever we start a new project or assignment whether it be developing the marketing plan, creating a brand positioning strategy, creating a market segmentation map – the stuff of our trade in marketing. It reflects a lot of thinking and work with numerous false starts, missteps, dead ends and countless adaptations. But then, it's the way of life.

Because it is the way of life we should learn to embrace that which promises to be uncomfortable. That's when learning occurs and we make forward progress. We grow and accomplish things of importance. Staying in the comfort zone can be stultifying. It leads to complacency and provides a lean and hungry competitor with an opportunity to catch, or even surpass, us. We need to learn to be comfortable with being uncomfortable.

One of the easiest things to do is to procrastinate and put off doing what is uncomfortable. This is the fear and flight response. There are a number of places we can flee to avoid being uncomfortable. Check on our email or return a few phone calls. Check on email again. Shuffle some papers. We've all been there and done that. But it is not a viable solution. Like the effect of a narcotic when it wears off, procrastination brings the pain crashing down upon us. All we've accomplished with answering all those email is to tighten the noose of time that we have to do that which makes us uncomfortable. So now we have to deal with stress too.

The other response is to surrender to being uncomfortable. Welcome it into our lives. Make it our friend. Wrap it around us like a warm blanket on a chilly night. It will protect us as a new day rises fresh with possibility.

BOATS & HELICOPTERS:

Here are some ways to get comfortable with being uncomfortable:

1. ***Enjoy the journey*** – We’re so anxious to get to the end. We can’t wait until we complete school. Can’t wait to get married and have a family. We can’t wait for that next promotion. We can’t wait until retirement. WOW, that’s a lot of “can’t waits.” Hurry, huRRY, hURRY, HURRY! We need the answer, the solution, NOW! We get to “**The End**” and as the late Peggy Lee sang, “Is that all there is?” The joy is in the journey, living in the present moment. It’s about getting lost in our activity, what Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi popularized in his book, FLOW – The Psychology of Optimal Experience.

Undertaking a new project, getting involved in something different opens us up to new learning. As we get deeper into what we are doing the learning unfolds. What we learn at one step in the process informs not only on what we should do next to carry us forward but what adaptations we should make to the work that came before it. We begin to pick-up a thread that connects one part to another in shaping a cohesive whole. It’s an act of creation. Creation is challenging but it is supremely rewarding. Lose yourself in what you are doing. Relish what you learn each step of the way without anguishing about the outcome. When the end does come then savor the experience and every way it has rewarded you.

2. ***Try a new angle*** – Take another approach. Ground yourself in the principles and best practices but look at and approach things from a new angle. Doing things the way they have always been done may have led to success in the past but will not necessarily work today, or tomorrow. Step back and perceive the big picture before you tackle the details or get sucked under by minutia. Approach the work as you would a game of chess. Don’t react mindlessly or otherwise to what lies before you. Instead, have a plan of attack and respond in the present moment to what you are learning.

Mix up your routine. Instead of slavishly addressing emails start your day with a planning session. Select that which makes you uncomfortable and devote 1-hour or uninterrupted time to working on it. Take an exercise break in the middle of the day. If you are already doing that then start the day with some exercise. Take a different route to work. Select a different beverage at lunch. Don’t be so d--n predictable! Exercise physiologists are learning the importance of mixing-up your exercise routine to better stimulate muscle growth and fitness gains. It’s about keeping the muscles guessing and delighting them with new activities or routines.

Do the same with that which makes you uncomfortable. Try approaching it from different angles. Eventually you will find the key that unlocks your mystery.

3. ***Give yourself the gift of time*** – Yes, time is a gift. You see things so much clearer with a little extra time. Something goes on in the brain that we cannot explain. Somehow all the stuff floating around in there regarding your project gets filtered. The impurities are filtered out. What’s more your mighty subconscious gets into the act. It is capable of doing really heavy lifting. Like a laser it can cut through the fog and light the way to a clear path. It’s rather illuminating, if you’ll excuse the pun. But you have to give your subconscious time to act. The poet Emily Dickenson said something to the effect that whenever she had something to solve she would deposit it in her subconscious to do her work for her. She likened it to posting a letter in the mailbox of her mind.

We get to see a lot of work done by client managers, each and every week. Regardless of the company, the category or the country we witness far too often less than satisfactory results from their work. It doesn't matter if that work is a brand positioning strategy, or creative brief or, even, ad campaign. The key factor contributing to the lack of satisfactory results is the lack of time managers give themselves, and their resource groups, to doing what needs to get done. We need to give ourselves the time to make mistakes, the time to engage our subconscious, the time to check our thinking. But as pointed out earlier we should not take the time to procrastinate!

4. **Scare yourself** – Now this is not the same as point number two, which is about taking a different approach. This is about having a different outcome. Find a new solution to an old problem or a pressing issue. It may help at the start, or wherever you are, to restate the problem or opportunity. That's likely to help you find a different solution. Throwaway last year's marketing plan and start from scratch with zero based budgeting. Separate the facts from hypotheses. (Do we really know that or is that what we believe?) Experiment with non-traditional media. Track results to learn its ROI. Listen to your customers and give'em what they want the way that they want it. It may make your operations a little more difficult but could pay dividends in creating a loyal relationship. However, the industry or category always does it do it differently. Give yourself the supreme satisfaction of taking that which feels uncomfortable to you and creating relevant, meaningful differentiation from your competitors (or colleagues). In other words, leave your mark.

Now we come to the end of this DISPATCHES article. The screen is no longer blank. There is no compulsion to further address the pulsing cursor. The time passed rather quickly. Whatever dread of being uncomfortable that may have nagged the mind at the start of this day has evaporated. Whoosh, it was lost in the joy of taking this journey. It was rather fun. Hope you have as much enjoyment in reading it as we had in its creating.

Now it's your turn. Go ahead. Make yourself uncomfortable.

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