



IS 'JUDGING A BOOK BY ITS COVER' A GOOD THING? PROBABLY NOT. SHOULD WE DO IT? NOPE. DO WE DO IT? ALL THE TIME. IS IT WRONG OF US, OR IS IT NATURAL? UNFORTUNATELY IT'S NATURAL. OR MAYBE FORTUNATELY; CONSIDERING IT WAS PROGRAMMED INTO THE DNA OF OUR CAVE-DWELLING ANCESTORS AS A SURVIVAL TOOL. IT WAS MEANT TO TRIGGER THE FLIGHT OR FIGHT RESPONSE AND IT'S A FACTOR IN MOST LIFE FORMS. SOMETIMES WAITING TO SEE IF THE INTENTION WAS CONSISTENT WITH THE APPEARANCE COULD GET YOU EATEN. "JUDGING A BOOK BY ITS COVER" IS OF COURSE A METAPHOR BUT LET'S CONSIDER THE IMPLICATIONS OF IT'S LITERAL MEANING. PUBLISHERS SPEND FORTUNES DESIGNING BOOK COVERS TO ATTRACT YOUR ATTENTION. ONCE ATTRACTED, YOU MAY FEEL THE INCLINATION TO OPEN THE BOOK AND EXPLORE THE POSSIBILITIES BY PERHAPS READING THE BLURB OR FRONTISPIECE. THIS TOO IS MEANT TO WHET YOUR APPETITE TO ACTUALLY BUY THE BOOK. IT IS HOWEVER, NO GUARANTEE THAT THE CONTENTS WILL LIVE UP TO THE PRESENTATION. FOR THE MONTH OF MAY, STUFF WILL OFFER RANDOM THOUGHTS ON THE SUBJECT AND EXPLORE THE GAUNTLET WE RUN WITH FIRST IMPRESSIONS, LASTING IMPRESSIONS AND THE RELATIONSHIPS THAT SHOULD LINK THEM. THAT FIRST DATE, THE JOB INTERVIEW AND NATURALLY, THE CUSTOMER ENCOUNTER.



THE FIRST DATE

This actually has a lot in common with the others. Firstly, the more desperate you get, the lower your standards become. TIP: you're better off in no relationship at all than in the wrong relationship. Shopping around is like dating. The intention is to create a relationship through mutual commitment. The wedding day is the delivery experience, the honeymoon period (early ownership) comes next and then there's the marriage when the honeymoon's over. The best marriages feel like honeymoons because there's chemistry. A great first date is no guarantee of a happy marriage even if it causes it. The real test to the romance will be how you recover from the first argument. My Mum's tip for the first date: watch how your date treats the waiter.

THE JOB INTERVIEW

Most managers agree with me that (like dating) you're better off under-staffed than wrongly-staffed. Again - standards! The job interview is a minefield for both sides. The interviewee may have been attracted by the job, the company or the brand but will seldom resign for any other reason than the boss. TIP: You're better off working for a bad boss in a good company than the other way around. A good company will fix or remove the bad boss. That's why they're a good company. The bosses are no better off at the interview stage. They've never seen a bad testimonial or a resume that says, "don't hire this person." What's on show at the interview is the personality but what the boss is stuck with is the character. Personalities aren't always previews to character, for better or worse.

THE SALES/SERVICE CUSTOMER ENCOUNTER

The big issue here is that most times, your company's ONLY point of difference is you. The first impression of the goods or services on offer has already been made prior to the encounter; which may have had nothing to do with you at all. Like a first date, the potential for a long term relationship hinges on issues like gut instinct, aesthetic appeal or the chemistry created. Routine is absolutely your greatest challenge. TIP: Try to forget what happened last time and focus 100% on the customer in front of you. No distractions, no predictability. The use of cliché will ensure that 'here we go' feeling in your customer's heart and mind and you become an instant stereotype. Suddenly the multi-million dollar showroom means little. It's just a facade.

AS YOU CAN SEE, THERE ARE PLENTY OF COMMON DENOMINATORS. HERE ARE SOME THOUGHTS THAT APPLY TO ALL THREE OF THE ABOVE SCENARIOS AND ANYTHING ELSE INTENDED TO CREATE HEALTHY, MUTUAL AND LASTING RELATIONSHIPS.

1. The operative word in any relationship of value is *commitment*.
 2. Commitment only works when it's mutual. So never be the one who commits more than your partner; be that in business or in life.
 3. If it isn't mutual, the partner who committed the most will be the victim. In sales and service, that means you'll end up a servant rather than a service professional. In life, you'll be a doormat. Better to be a matador.
 4. Commitment will be near impossible to elicit if the mind of the customer is confused. The confused mind always says "NO". Or worse, "I want to think about it."
 5. To gain commitment, the intentions must be sincere, transparent and in harmony with the heritage of the brand, the quality of the facility or the values of the institution.
 6. Respect needs to be shown first in order to be earned.
 7. First impressions mostly manifest from gut feelings, even prejudice, intuition or prior experience. Good lasting impressions however are created from experiencing consistent integrity.
 8. Professionally, our futures will rely on our ability to retain relationships rather than to find them. The escalating cost of doing business, a crowded market, the uncertainty of supply, the blurring of prime marketing areas and fickle customers will contribute to leakage unless the agenda and skills of agents are focused on issues of loyalty. At work, HR is a minefield and the challenges are due largely to an unwillingness to comply or commit to notions like career. In life, the divorce rate is skyrocketing, the notion of what constitutes 'family' has blurred and family court rooms have ever longer queues. It seems commitment isn't what it once was. Perhaps its rareness adds to its power when perceived. Let's face it, first impressions are perceptions just like value is a perception. The good news is that value is a powerful perception and is subjective to taste, desire and a sense of opportunity.
- FINALLY: AVOID BEING PREDICTABLE. PEOPLE WHO COMMIT OFTEN DO SO SPONTANEOUSLY WHEN THEY PERCEIVE SOMETHING SPECIAL.

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