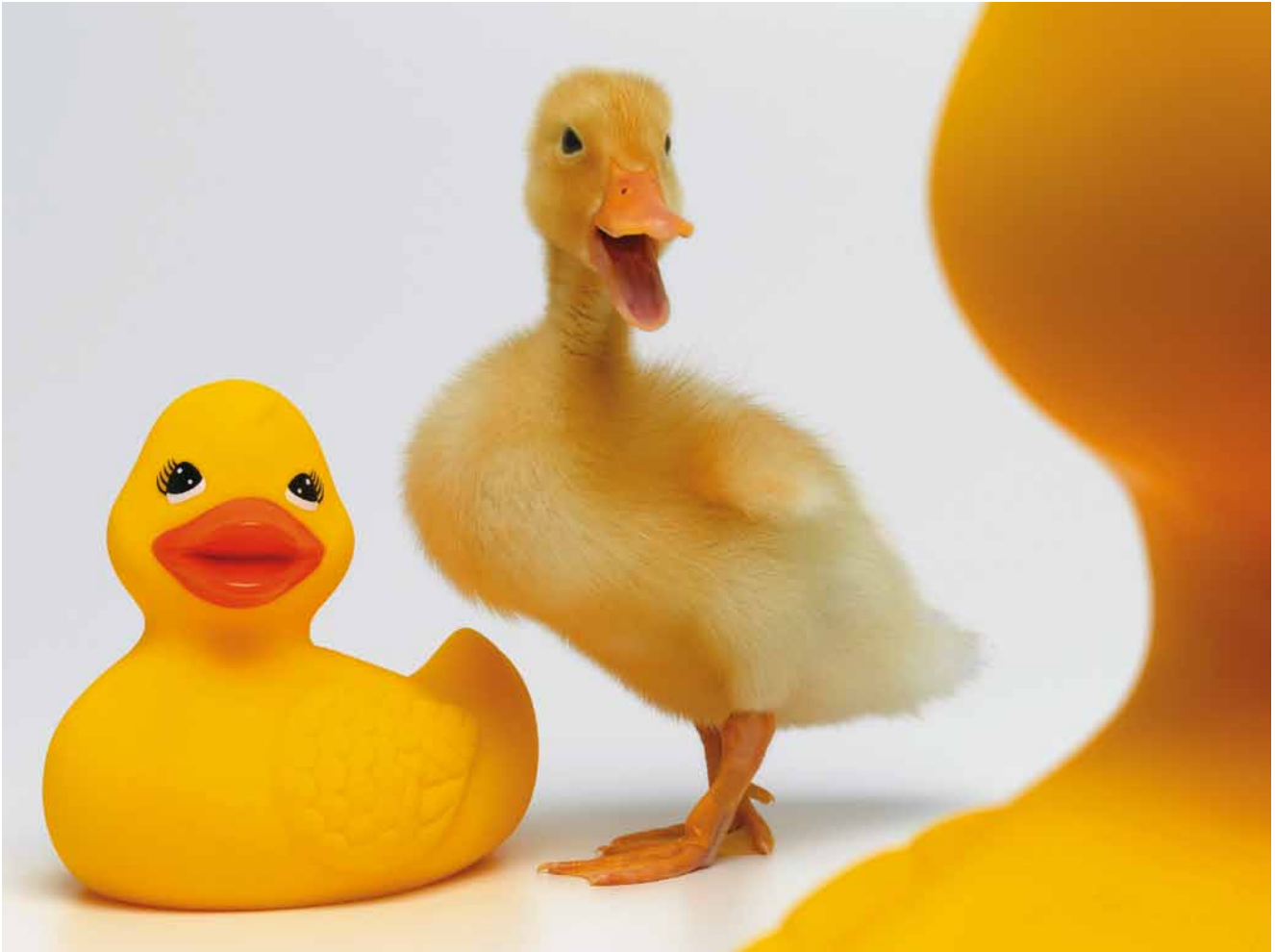


SMART AGENCY

..... BUSINESS INTELLIGENCE FOR SAVVY AGENTS



LEADERSHIP LESSONS

Amateur Hour?

True leadership requires asking the right people the right questions

By Jeff Mowatt

Judging by the way we elect some of our political leaders, you'd think the three most important qualities to leadership are popularity, an outgoing personality and loyalty to your supporters.

But when you're the "top dog" in an organization, there's a more effective way to strengthen customer loyalty, increase spending per customer and enhance team spirit. How can you separate yourself from the amateurs who have a title, but nothing beneath the surface? By sniffing out the

right information.

Amateur leaders think the key to increased profits is to simply reduce costs and work harder. The flaw in this leadership style is that efficiency is usually not the problem. The problem usually lies with their products and services not staying attuned to the needs of the marketplace.

To a professional leader, there's no use in finding a faster way to climb the ladder if the ladder's leaning on the wrong wall. Leaders constantly, systematically and

proactively check to make sure they are heading in the right direction. Here are some tips for how you can do the same:

Ask your competition. Professionals learn to innovate by discussing issues with their competitors. Sound absurd? Join your trade association. It's filled with competitors who recognize that none of us is as smart as all of us. Amateur leaders shun the competition, but professionals understand that today's competitor may be tomorrow's business partner.

Ask your customers. Amateurs think they understand the needs of their customers because they do business with them. But how many times have you eaten at a restaurant and decided that you wouldn't go back?

Statistically, only one out of every 27 dissatisfied customers actually complains. Amateurs wonder why business is dropping off, but professionals regularly test and verify client satisfaction.

Consider using local business students to conduct surveys. Students get huge response rates. Wouldn't you be more likely to answer a few questions to "help a student with their class project?" Bonus: Students are a whole lot cheaper than commercial firms.

Ask your employees. After all, they're closer to the customers than you are.

Educate yourself. Amateurs are know-it-alls. They seem to believe they're supposed to come up with all the good ideas. But professionals rely on the success of others and apply it to their own practices, reading books, listening to tapes and attending seminars to soak up more knowledge.

Jeff Mowatt (jeffmowatt.com) is a customer service strategist and professional speaker.

“
Today's
competitor
may be
tomorrow's
business
partner.
”

THE ART OF UNDERPROMISING

Amateur leaders ooze golden promises and good intentions because they think the key to being successful is popularity. In other words, they lie a lot.

Professional leaders know their most valuable asset is their personal reputation. It's simply not worth jeopardizing that reputation by making a commitment they may not be able to keep. So professionals make a practice of underpromising and overdelivering. —J.M.

OFF THE SHELF



TALK LIKE TED:
THE 9 PUBLIC SPEAKING SECRETS
OF THE WORLD'S TOP MINDS
By Carmine Gallo

Selling to a group instead of one at a time is efficient. Unfortunately, for many, the notion is terrifying—most folks have convinced themselves to be deathly afraid of any type of public speaking. Fortunately, speaking to a group is a skill that can be learned—and for those who are willing, this is an excellent resource. The TED (“technology, entertainment and design”) platform features some of the best speakers in the world, and Gallo’s book quantifies their techniques in a learnable format.

★★★★

THANKS FOR THE FEEDBACK:
THE SCIENCE AND ART OF RECEIVING
FEEDBACK WELL



By Douglas Stone and Sheila Heen

Of the seemingly millions of texts telling bosses how to offer feedback and companies how to collect it, this is one of the first that truly educates those on the receiving end about how to interpret it—specifically, how to understand when feedback is being offered (hint: it's not always intentional), what to do with it and when to blow it off. The book is sharp, hysterical and largely positive, and it proves an excellent read for everyone, from the ultra-eager and sensitive to the hardened know-it-alls.

★★★★

A MORE BEAUTIFUL QUESTION:
THE POWER OF INQUIRY TO SPARK
BREAKTHROUGH IDEAS

By Warren Berger



Both practical and deeply philosophical, this book is a wonderful respite from the “Google it” culture ingrained in almost every aspect of our personal and professional lives. As an insurance agent, finding the quickest and easiest answers to an insured’s exposure seems efficient. But Berger argues, quite convincingly, that the level of communication lost by instant gratification shuts off the part of the brain that facilitates big-picture, long-term thinking. The science and strategy in his book is equally fascinating and valuable.

★★★★