

IF YOU SHARE, WILL THEY CARE?

It was a breakthrough that made Australian researchers Barry Marshal and Robin Warren famous and earned them the Nobel Prize. Their findings were considered a medical miracle that revolutionized how doctors treated painful stomach ulcers. Prior to Marshal and Warren's discovery, the medical community believed that stomach ulcers were incurable. Doctors focused only on reducing the pain that the ulcers triggered. However, in 1982 Marshal and Warren proved that the majority of stomach ulcers were not caused by a person's lifestyle or stress level, as was commonly thought, but by a bacteria known as *helicobacter pylori*.¹ In addition, Marshal and Warren's experiments also demonstrated that stomach ulcers could be cured by eliminating the *b. pylori* bacteria with antibiotics. This realization had the power to enhance the lives of millions of people who were suffering from stomach ulcers.

As astounding as this development was, what is even more shocking is how it was received. One would imagine that when Marshal and Warren informed the medical community about their research there would be parades in their honor and they would be showered with accolades. Yet, what happened was...nothing!

In spite of the rigorous research that Marshal and Warren had to support their conclusions, scientists shunned their discovery and medical journals refused to publish their research. When Marshal and Warren did conjure up an opportunity to present their findings, the reception they received was indifference.

The reason that those within the medical community originally rejected Marshal and Warren's conclusions was not because of the accuracy or quality of their research. Rather, scientists were skeptical of Marshal and Warren. This is clearly demonstrated by the words of one scientist who, after viewing a presentation by Marshal, was quoted as saying that Marshall, "simply didn't have the demeanor of a scientist."² As absurd as it may seem, it took years for Marshall and Warren's discovery to be accepted. Upon analysis, it is clear that it was not their findings that were rejected, but it was the way they presented themselves and their research.

Likewise, many business owners, executives and sales people have embraced the widespread delusion that if they have a quality product or service all they must do is "share" its benefits and people will embrace it. However, this inept belief could not be farther from the truth. Hundreds of scientific studies have conclusively proven that a person's perception and interpretation of a message is shaped by how that message is conveyed. The more effectively a message is communicated the more favorably it will be received and the more likely it will be acted upon. Jay Conger wrote about this in his *Harvard Business Review* article, where he affirmed, "Persuasion... involves careful preparation, the proper framing of arguments, the presentation of vivid supporting evidence, and the effort to find the correct emotional match with your audience."³ In short, influencing another person is more complex than amateurishly "sharing."

The belief, "if you share, they will care" is not only wrong, but it actually facilitates failure. The reality

is that the majority of businesses fail. For example, in 2005 the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics reports that 56% of all companies go out of business within 4 years.⁴ Furthermore, Dunn & Bradstreet report that in today's challenging economic climate businesses have a 40% higher failure rate than they did a few years ago.⁵ These organizations do not perish because they have inferior products or services. They die because they are unable to convince people that what they offer is relevant.

Now to be sure, the quality of your product or service is vital. Yet, so is how you present your product or service. For instance, the conclusions of numerous surveys which have examined the buying behaviors of over 100,000 people revealed that often a decision to purchase is based not on the features, quality or even price of a product or service, but upon the person presenting the product or service.⁶ Hillary Chura addressed this in one of her *New York Times* articles where she cites numerous examples of how a presenter's ability to communicate was the deciding factor in whether his or her message was met with acceptance or rejection.⁷ Neuroscientist Gregory Berns aptly summarized this reality when he confirmed, "A person can have the greatest idea in the world – completely different and novel – but if that person can't convince enough other people, it doesn't matter."⁸

Sharing So People Care

So how can you persuasively communicate your product or service to others? In the past, the answer to this essential question was a mystery because, though some basic knowledge about how people were influenced was known, influence had never been systematically studied. Today, this is no longer the case.

In the last few decades there have been thousands of scientific experiments focused on obtaining an exact understanding of what enables and creates influence. The conclusions of this mountain of research revolutionized what scientists know about how influence occurs. There is now a consensus within the scientific community regarding the scientific principles that generate influence. These principles are measurable and repeatable and when leveraged they have the persuasive power to boost one's capacity to influence another. Behavioral scientists Douglas Kenrick, Noah Goldstein and Sanford Braver affirm:

For well over 50 years, researchers have been applying a rigorous scientific approach to the question of which messages most successfully lead people to concede, comply, or change. Scientists have long employed a set of systematic procedures for discovering and replicating findings, including persuasion findings. As a consequence, the study of persuasion no longer exists only as an ethereal art. It is now a science that can reproduce its results. What is more, whoever engages in the scientific process can reproduce its results. Brilliant, inspired individuals are no longer necessary to divine the truth about persuasions, for a compelling new reason: The power of discovery doesn't reside, Socrates-style, inside the minds of a few persuasive geniuses anymore but inside the scientific process.⁹

The question is, “are you leveraging the proven scientific principles of influence when you present your product or service?” Your answer to this important question will ultimately determine your survival and level of success. In today’s hyper-competitive economic climate, not presenting a product or service effectively can have devastating effects: careers are ruined, businesses die and dreams go unrealized. In addition, those who encounter the product or service will reject it not on its merit, but because of how poorly it was presented. As researchers Brad Sagarin and Kevin Mitnick assert, “In the marketplace, practitioners live or die by their skill at harnessing the principles of influence. The skilled prosper. The unskilled go out of business.”¹⁰

Persuasively communicating the value and validity of your product or service is a mission critical endeavor that is far too important to be based upon unskilled sharing or careless trial and error. The Hoffeld Group specializes in guiding people and organizations in utilizing the scientifically proven principles of influence in their communication with potential customers. The results are that when communicative behaviors are aligned with science, interactions are enriched and so is effectiveness.

About the Author

David Hoffeld is CEO of the Hoffeld Group, a research based sales training, coaching and consulting firm that is the leader in the integration of proven science and sales. The Hoffeld Group takes the repeatable and predictable principles, which science has proven to create and enable influence, out of the laboratory and academic journals and apply them to selling. For a deeper look at the Hoffeld Group’s groundbreaking research and innovative sales strategies visit HoffeldGroup.com.

Notes

1. “Press Release: The 2005 Nobel Prize in Physiology or Medicine”. *Nobelprize.org*. Jan 15, 2013 http://www.nobelprize.org/nobel_prizes/medicine/laureates/2005/press.html
2. Daniel Haney. “News That Ulcers Are Caused by Bacteria Travels Slowly to MD’s.” *Buffalo News*. February 11, 1996.
3. Jay Conger. “The Necessary Art of Persuasion.” *Harvard Business Review Onpoint*. (Fall 2010). p. 46.
4. Amy Knaup. *Monthly Labor Review*. U.S. Bureau of Labor Statics, May 2005. p. 51.
5. Dun & Bradstreet. *The State of Small Businesses Post Recession*. (May, 2011).
6. Suzanne Fogel, David Hoffmeister, Richard Rocco and Daniel P. Struck. “Teaching Sales.” *Harvard Business Review*, July – August, 2012. p. 94.
7. Hillary Chura. “Um, Uh, Like Call in the Speech Coach.” *New York Times*, January 11, 2007.
8. Gregory Berns. “Neuroscientist Reveals How Nonconformists Achieve Success.” *Emory University Press Release*, September 25th, 2008, available at http://www.whsc.emory.edu/press_releases2.cfm?announcement_id_seq=15766
9. Douglas T. Kenrick, Noah J. Goldstein and Sanford Braver (eds.). *Six Degrees of Social Influence*. (Oxford: Oxford Press, 2012). p. vii.
10. Brad Sagarin and Kevin Mitnick. “The Path of Least Resistance.” *Six Degrees of Social Influence*. Douglas T. Kenrick, Noah J. Goldstein and Sanford Braver (eds.), (Oxford: Oxford Press, 2012). p. 26.