

Think Smart

INTEGRATING PSYCHOLOGY AND MARKETING

Get Me An Astronaut Who Failed!

So how do you recruit an astronaut? If you were to draw up a list of criteria off the top of your head, it would probably include experience of flying, a science or engineering background, perfect vision, trustworthiness, physical fitness and a strong team ethic. These are pretty much the qualities NASA was looking for when it was recruiting astronauts for the Apollo 11 mission to the moon. Except it added another key ingredient: they wanted evidence of resilience in the face of significant failure.

This was driven by the belief that those who had turned failure to their advantage were more likely to be resourceful when events didn't turn out the way they were supposed to. 'My hunch,' wrote the psychologist Martin Seligman, 'is that for a given level of intelligence your actual achievement is a function not just of talent, but also of the capacity to withstand defeat.'

As entrepreneurs we know the importance of learning from failure and using its lessons to make our businesses better. But how many of us really integrate this knowledge into our behaviour? When you don't get the deal you expected to get, when your creditors don't pay when they promised they would, when your business fails, do you say to yourself 'I've got to learn from that' or do you blame anyone except yourself. The ego is precious and ingenious in the many ways it deflects attention from its own limitations and it is the ego that means most of us don't have the courage to take responsibility for our losses. Psychologists call this the 'self-serving bias'.

Take, for example, the high-school students asked to do an intelligence test. After the test was completed, each student was given a document containing scientific arguments for or against intelligence tests. Not surprisingly, the group who accepted the arguments against the tests as a means of measuring intelligence were those who had scored lowest!

In business as in life, the price of such 'self-serving bias' is high – even if the short-term relief it gives our ego seems worth it at the time. It turns us into victims of circumstance and takes away our power to learn and do better next time. Perfectionism, addictive behaviour, the 'poor me' or 'martyrdom' syndrome, are all consequences of our refusal to take ownership of our failures. You cannot change or improve upon what you do not control. If you can take responsibility when a creditor goes bust leaving you with a debt to write off, when the bank calls in your facility or when you go bust for any reason whatsoever, you are less likely to make the same mistake again and more likely to bounce back stronger than ever.

Of course, there are things you can't control, such as the collapse of the global banking system. But you can control and take responsibility for how you react to it. Taking responsibility is not taking blame. It is not asking you to hang your head in shame. It is asking you to attach emotion to your mistakes, to know that you are more than your mistakes, to learn from your mistakes and move on. And, having done all this, and achieved everything you ever wanted to achieve, you can always call NASA and celebrate your mid-life crisis in style!

NEW BUSINESS

Soundcraft

Cognition is looking forward to the future, after winning two new accounts. Soundcraft is a major independent manufacturer and distributor of architectural doors, doorsets and joinery for the UK construction industry. [MORE>](#)

Mind Associates

Mind Associates is an interesting new win for Cognition. The company was established in October 2003 and is a client-focused training and consultancy company. [MORE>](#)

VISIT OUR WEBSITE

Our brand new website includes useful guides on a range of marketing topics, video testimonials from our clients, examples of our recent work and further information on the services we offer. Take a moment to look around to find out what we could do for you.

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DIARY DATE

27th April 2009 – The Business Convention - The Road to Recovery, The ICC, Birmingham.

At 1pm, Dr Peter Hughes from Cognition will be running a business surgery alongside the main Convention. The surgery, which will last 50 minutes, is called 'The Bad Habits of Elephants and Entrepreneurs'. Dr Hughes will offer practical and psychological solutions on how to survive and thrive in a recession.

For more information on Cognition, visit Cognition's website or call 01926 330800.