

# If It's C\*\*p Say So

There is a very good reason why SMEs are suspicious of motivational/performance training companies that say they will increase staff motivation and performance: the technical term for it is cognitive dissonance. To you and me that means you know something is of no business benefit at all but somehow you were persuaded to pay for it and now you're doing your best to convince yourself, against every last drop of your better judgement, that you made the right decision.

In his book, 'Blink', Malcolm Gladwell, author of 'The Tipping Point', writes about what he calls 'thin slicing' – our ability to know immediately what we need to know about a person or situation, before we are conscious of it. This, he argues, is what enables us to make good, split-second decisions in critical situations. It also helps when you need to make quick decisions about whether the office you have just walked into is telling you 'Deal with this business' or 'Get out fast!'. Let me give you an example. Early in December I was asked by a client to visit one of their suppliers, an engineering company. I walked into one of the most drab, uninspiring reception areas that I have ever walked into. The paint on the walls was flaking near the ceiling and there was a broken table in the corner with a half-drunk cup of coffee on it. In the centre was the main desk, behind which sat the receptionist. But there was one thing that was truly shocking about this reception area. On either side of the receptionist, perched on the edge of her desk, were two brightly coloured, stuffed toys: a parrot and a camel. On the floor in front of the desk was a board with all manner of brightly coloured animals on it with the words, 'Service is Everything!' written in large, block letters.

## I couldn't resist.

'You've been on a training course, haven't you?' I asked the receptionist.

'How do you know that?' she asked.

When I realised there was not a hint of irony in her voice, I resisted the urge to scream, 'It's the stuffed animals, stupid!!!' and replied in my best voice, 'Well, just something about service being everything.'

'Oh yes,' she said.

'And the parrot and the camel were a bit of a clue as well.

What are they all about?' I asked.

'The parrot means I have to find something bright and positive every day and I think the camel says I'm there to support our customers.'

'Think?' I said, 'So you're not sure.'

She glanced quickly to either side of the desk to check if anyone was listening.

'Put it this way,' I continued, feeling a bit more adventurous, 'Morale is low in the business, isn't it? So you got sent on this course and told about how to be positive but then you come back here and it's all the same as it was before. I always believe, if it's c\*\*p, say so, then at least we can all be honest about the situation and go about the business of making it better.'

She smiled. Enough said.

What really bothered me about this was not just the fact that somebody was prepared to pay good money for those stuffed animals. It was the fact that someone somewhere was deluded enough to think it would make a difference. In any business, and especially for SMEs, it is always best to face reality as it is not as you think it ought to be. Motivation and empowerment don't come from courses or clever techniques. They come from two things. First, having a business with strong boundaries and total commercial transparency with your customers. It serves no-one, especially your customers, if you believe they're always right – the simple fact is, they're not! Second, making sure your staff know exactly what is expected of them - and having the systems and management in place to reward them for getting it right and for putting them right when they don't.

And lastly, if you do train your staff in the areas of personal development, make sure you 'thin-slice' your training provider. If it feels good, do it. If it doesn't, let someone else have the stuffed animals. I'm sure they'll be very grateful.



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## TOP TIPS: DIGITAL PART 1

### Identify what it is you're hoping to achieve.

Do you want to raise your company's profile? Generate leads, or drive people to your shop? One or all of these can be achieved but your strategy should be developed with an end goal in mind.

### Know your audience.

Find out as much as you can about the online behaviour of the market you're looking to attract. Think about the decision-making process from their point of view, and to try to exploit any opportunities that arise throughout it.

### Consider usability.

How your website is structured should take into account the preferences and limitations of your audience so that their visit is as straightforward and rewarding as possible.

### Keep copy compelling, concise and clear.

Online copy doesn't need to be short, but it does need to hold the interest of the reader, and small chunks are easier to digest.

### Capture data where you can.

Give visitors incentives for leaving their details so you can build your database and communicate with them in the future.

## Watch out for PART 2 next month