The Joy of Marketing Innovation: Finding Your Labor of Love

The best things in life are free, but we can still profit from them. In business, we often associate market success with personal sacrifice, diligent suffering, and dogged persistence. That is how many interpret the often-cited “80/20 principle” -- meaning 80 percent of the success is achieved by the hardest working and highest sacrificing 20 percent of the group. Yet, the key to business and marketing success is found in the simple joys of life.

I recently participated in the CSUB Enterprise College, under the direction of Economics Professor, Dr. Abbas Grammy. The room was filled to capacity on a hot Bakersfield summer afternoon with high school students who had sacrificed vacation leisure to study economics. Ironically, the students were exuberant and teeming with purposeful enthusiasm.

Just next door, there was a class of nursing graduates taking a prep course for the RN exam. Even though the door was closed, a wave of tension and anxiety emanated from the room. In that instant, it became clear that principles of success reflected in the 80/20 rule have more to do with the character of aspiration than the conditions of affliction.

Both classes of students endured the same set of conditions. In fact, the nursing students stood to gain significantly greater rewards for their sacrifice than the high school students. It would be convenient to credit youth for the spirited optimism, or attribute stressful pessimism to exam pressure. Instead, the high school students simply decided to love their situation of labor, whereas the nursing students chose to ignore their inner wellspring of joy. However, this account is not a generalization about high school and RN students. The same observation might occur in another situation with burdened high school pupils and buoyant RN prospects. It illustrates a professional choice we each encounter everyday in markets, companies, and indeed in ourselves. Namely, the decision to harnessing the joy in our character or be held captive by conditions.

The evidence of innovation’s role in business and marketing success is irrefutable. Federal Express reinvented the package delivery industry through logistics process innovation. 3M remade the notepad market with a chemical glue innovation that posted without permanently sticking. Apple Computer achieved market dominance in music, movies, and phones based on innovative product design. Google developed a search engine innovation, when Microsoft controlled web browser technology, which could have been easily programmed to search. Under Armor athletic wear outdistanced industry leaders like Nike and Champion with a simple fabric innovation that has been leveraged into an entire equipment line. Vitamin Water bested
both soft drink and vitamin providers by innovatively blending the essential elements of each into a line of branded products. For each of these examples, the focus should not be on the innovation, but rather on the spirit of the companies’ human innovators. Why can one company’s workers find value in the new while another company’s workers search for the new without finding value? The answer is people devoted to a labor of love, creating the joy of marketing innovation.

In 1976, amidst a prolonged U.S. stagflation, Tibor Scitovsky penned The Joyless Economy to examine the psychology of human satisfaction. His findings are counterintuitive. Human desire for comfort often confuses laxity for leisure, and is deprived of the satisfaction from overcoming a desirable challenge through determined learning. In other words, the reward of peaceful rest is most fully realized following the rigors of purposeful work. So, the joy of marketing begins with a job well done (fulfilling) … not merely doing a job well (finishing).

Can this labor of love leading to the joy of marketing innovation be taught, trained, and managed? Yes it can! Many business professionals are aware of Drucker’s mantra that; “effectiveness is doing the right things and efficiency is doing things right.” However, few are aware that he distilled these principles into a classic Harvard Business Review article titled “The Art of Managing Oneself.” In that article, Drucker reveals that for the individual professional and worker, effectiveness comes from focusing on your strengths (doing right things), and efficiency comes from knowing how you learn (doing things right). In essence, Drucker is guiding individuals to do the things they love and to continuously learn by finding situations that fit. The management field encodes this truism as “theory y” and “theory z” job design.

Malcolm Gladwell’s popular book, Outliers, amplifies Drucker’s guidance on finding joy in work and a labor of love. He calls it a “10,000 hour rule” – which is roughly the equivalent of 10 years. Gladwell defines “outliers” as successful people who apply the 10,000-hour rule to transition from being ordinary talents to becoming extraordinary talents, in any line of professional endeavor. But if a robot could be programmed to do work precisely in 1 hour, then what is the point of waiting for humans to develop over 10,000 hours? Although a robot may do a job well, a job well done entails fulfilling the talent through creative innovation in a way that produces unique value. That’s what the 10,000-hour rule implies, and it suggests something else. Why does someone devote 10 years to the same repetitious skill – often without pay? By now you know the answer, because it is a labor of love that leads to the joy of marketing innovation.

In summary, I have discussed how accessing the joy of marketing innovation by finding a labor of love can overcome complacency in our 2011 “joyless economy” and refocus business professionals on a commitment to challenging work. As you plan for the future, embrace the journey toward business and marketing success as a winding road through uncertain woods. Yet, by choosing the right mission and market, the burdens of strategic improvement become a source of business innovation. As we recall those exuberant high school students thrilled to study economics on a hot Bakersfield summer afternoon, remember that the joy of marketing innovation comes from learning to love what you do each moment of everyday.
Source
