

The Commitment Model

Part Four of Four

Essence Communications

Strategy, Research and Stakeholder Engagement

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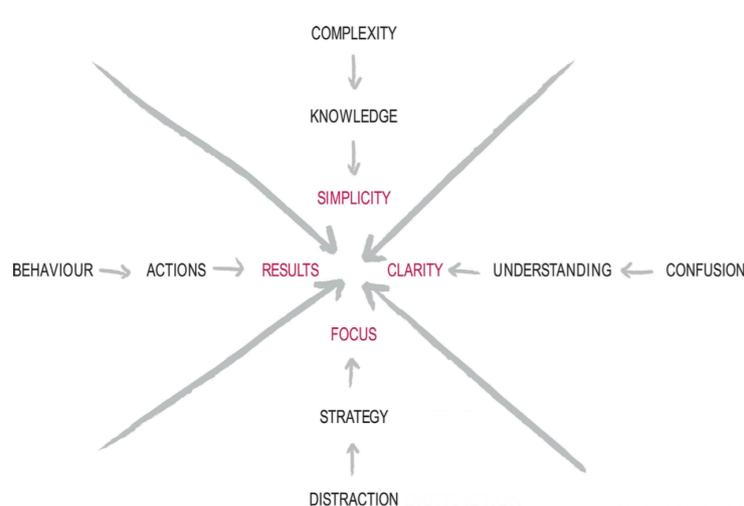
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essence.

This e-book is the final in a series of four that explains each quadrant of the Commitment Model demonstrated below:



The first e-book explains the first quadrant – from Complexity to Simplicity, the second explains from Confusion to Clarity, the third does from Distraction to Focus and this is the final one, from Behaviour to Results. If you do not have the other ones, please hop back onto the website at www.essencecomms.com.au and go to the Resources section. Then enter the password VAULT and you will be able to access a range of e-books including this series.

This e-book is the final one in the series of four looking at how to gain greater commitment by moving from Behaviour to Results. It is important that a brand's behaviour reflects that which is true to the essence of what it's about. But this quadrant is particularly crucial for those organisations who have front line 'salespeople' – because those very people are often THE main carriers of your brand. The behaviour of you, your senior management team and your front line staff is the biggest telegraph of your culture than anything else at all.

This includes those organisations that do not have a traditional sales or marketing function at all. Many people say to me that they 'don't have to worry about marketing' – but my view is, if you don't have a formal marketing function but you still interact with 'customers' who buy your services, then marketing is still important. And worse, it becomes everyone's responsibility, not just that of the marketing department! It can be an interesting conversation with a nurse for example that she is also a 'marketer' and responsible for promoting the brand essence of the health service in which she works. It is her very behaviour and actions that will influence the 'customer' perception of

the health service as a whole – therefore in my book, she's a marketer. Custodian of the brand experience. Simple.

I admit I always have a quiet giggle whenever I visit a client who proudly displays those Mission Statements, Visions or Values in big posters on the walls of their foyer. They may once have been unique and different (back in the 80's) – but do they now not realise that we are well past the point of these hackneyed, overdone statements? Particularly for many internal staff – look at those employees who despite the global financial crisis are still inclined to bounce around a lot of different employers (like Gen Y) – do you not think they have seen exactly the same set of words in a million other receptions??

Just because you SAY these are your values, doesn't mean you LIVE those values. And if you don't LIVE your values, then your employees and target audiences will not believe your brand promise.

As they say in the classics, 'telling ain't selling'.

Yet still people persist in telling telling telling under the misguided view that if only we could just TELL everyone how great we are, then they will believe us.

Take for example one of my favourite mission statements, reprinted below. It's a pretty stock standard one, from a real company:

COMMUNICATION: We have an obligation to communicate. Here, we take the time to talk with one another and to listen. We believe that information is meant to move and that information moves people

RESPECT: We treat others as we would like to be treated ourselves. We do not tolerate abusive or disrespectful treatment

INTEGRITY: We work with our customers and prospects openly, honestly and sincerely. When we say we will do something, we will do it. When we say we cannot or will not do something, then we won't do it

EXCELLENCE: We are satisfied with nothing less than the very best in everything we do. We will continue to raise the bar for everything we do. We will have fun discovering just how good we can be.

So who's mission statement do you reckon that is?

It's Enron. Enron's mission statement. At the time they almost single-handedly brought down the US economy through pure dishonesty.

So what I am saying is that actions speak louder than words. And actions and behaviours deliver results, not hollow words.

How often have we been on the end of one of those recorded messages where they say, 'Your call is important to us, we value your call' and then they keep you on hold for ages. And we sit on the end of the hold thinking, you know what? I don't feel very valued. And it doesn't matter how many times you come back and tell me, lady with automated voice, that I am valued – repeating it does NOT make me feel more valued. If you actually answered the phone (actions, behaviours) then I might feel valued.

The thing about changing behaviour is that it is very difficult, especially amongst well-established, older senior management. One of my favourite proverbs is 'Change takes an instant, resistance takes a lifetime'. And I think that is often the case when a business has worked out who they want to talk to, what they want to say, and how they want to say it – but their behaviour is not quite in line with all of the above. It is especially so when one looks at internal culture and process.

There was a very famous study done by some scientists in San Francisco with a troop of monkeys. (Yes, a group of monkeys is a troop. I had to Google it to find out, but there you go). So this troop of monkeys were put in a cage together and they soon found a big bunch of bananas at the top of a set of stairs. However, when a monkey actually tried to climb the stairs, the scientists had rigged it up so that the monkey was in fact sprayed with a jet blast of cold water. (Sick puppies, scientists). Anyway over time, each monkey had a go at ascending the stairs and each one was hit with the cold water. And over time they obviously came to learn that those bananas and the steps were bad news.

Then they took one monkey out and put a new monkey in. And the new monkey of course headed for the bananas. But as the new monkey got to the bottom step, the other monkeys jumped on him and dragged him back until he was educated to not climb the stairs. They repeated this over time, replacing an old monkey with a new one until in the end, they had a whole bunch of new monkeys in the cage, none of whom had ever suffered the consequences of the cold water, and none of them went near the stairs.

The importance of that study into behaviour and actions is very powerful stuff. Selling - and brands - are really just about storytelling, and some markets are driven by storytelling more than others. Aspects

of mythology in terms of behaviours are not just important internally but just as important externally. Nike is a good example - the Asian sweatshop crisis caused significant damage to the Nike brand story, and this was an absolute powerhouse of marketing.

Generation Y in particular are more intent than any other generation on getting behind the company front as to what is actually going on. They want to know where the company is headed, what the corporate ethos is, how much time the organisation is spending on community service - even if they only just want to buy a simple product from the company. This is one reason why Corporate and Social Responsibility (CSR) programs have never been so en vogue.

So the behaviour of your brand, and what you are selling, has to stack up. We know actions speak louder than words, and actions generate results. So why don't people act more definitively, more decisively, more quickly?

Well, a couple of years ago, my Dad had a heart attack. I was at home on a cold Tuesday night and got a phone call to say Dad had suffered a heart attack and was on his way to Cabrini Hospital in an ambulance. So I jumped in the car and pretty much met the ambo at the door.

Dad's treatment had begun, but they were still doing the administrative procedures and checks that every bureaucratic organisation is famous for. He was on a bed with all tubes and stuff hooked up, and was being wheeled towards the cardiac unit. As Dad was progressing down the corridor, the Admitting Nurse was running alongside trying to fill in all the info on the admission form. She was asking all the usual stuff - name, age, private health insurance cover etc.

She then asked 'Are you a smoker, sir?'

Now my Father had been a lifelong drinker, smoker, gambler and generally unhealthy person. And he looked the nurse straight in the face and answered 'No, I am not!'

I was mortified! Horrified that Dad would actually lie to a nurse I interjected 'Dad! You are so a smoker!'

And with a twinkle in his eye, he looked at me, then looked straight at the nurse, and calmly announced 'I just gave up!'

I thought about this some time later and it really gives you an insight into human nature doesn't it? I mean, you don't seek marriage guidance counseling until someone is sleeping on the couch. You don't finish off all the little painting and decorating tasks on the house until you are about to sell it. And you don't give up smoking until you are being wheeled into a cardiac ward! Such is the nature of people.

Whether it be your internal employees you are marketing to, or your external customers, it is a truth that people don't like to change. And in fact, many people in business deliberately bury themselves in 'analysing the data' in order to avoid making a decision and taking decisive action. I have witnessed firsthand the growing disease of information overload leading to the fatal outcome of analysis paralysis. Whilst people are immersed in analysis, the market steadily changes and evolves. One day you wake up, the world has irrevocably changed but you are still exhibiting old behaviours.

General George Patton once said 'A good plan, violently executed now, is better than a perfect plan next week.'

Darn right! Don't get me wrong, I am not advocating a crash and burn strategy where no regard is paid to common sense and sound analysis of the key statistics that really count. But there is too much talk and not enough action with positive behaviours going on in corporate Australia these days.

It is this type of action oriented approach that led me to the development of Forced Focus thinking. Forced Focus thinking helps guide actionable outcomes for a variety of issues and problems. It applies to any type of problem that requires a rethink because circumstances have changed. Quite simply, Forced Focus thinking applies pressure to a group of people or a process to ensure a focussed result. Not threatening or invasive pressure – but pressure that focuses the team on actions and behaviors that lead to actual outcomes.

There are four key steps; **1. QUESTION**

A key part of Forced Focus thinking is about asking the right questions of the right people to get the answers you really need. Information should be categorised into 'nice to know' and 'need to know'.

I once worked for a client who made bread and decided to conduct an enormous evaluation of the bread market. This client wanted to use the research to ask everything he had ever wanted to know about

bread. My favourite question I tried repeatedly to delete was the percentage of people who cut their sandwich bread on the diagonal versus the vertical. Now, this is a clear example of a 'nice to know'. How could anyone possibly use that information to make any difference whatsoever? The fact we discover what percentage of Australians cut their sandwiches into squares versus triangles was what was occupying this client – whilst the bread market was slowly heading into a revolutionary par-baked model in retail, and the growth of GI, added fibres and other nutritional innovations threatened to change the bread market irrevocably.

It is harder to ask five great questions than ask twenty average ones. Adopt forced focus thinking, limit yourself to five great questions that will truly set your future course and ask the right people.

2. DISENGAGE

I think it is fantastic when clients are excited and passionate about their product. But sometimes knowing too much and having a predetermined and strongly held view of the world can be a bad thing. This is when some serious disengagement is required.

Yet the view from a distance is exactly what forced focus thinking requires. Good distance allows you to objectively determine three key issues - (1) what exactly the problem is (harder than it sounds), (2) why you have the problem and (3) what outcome you want. Then your behaviours and actions are set towards the right result.

3. GENERATE

This is my favourite and most creative part of forced focus thinking. The group needs to brainstorm a list of alternative ideas to solve the problem you have identified. But no blue sky brainstorming – it has to be structured. For example, if you want ideas, each team must deliver three in fifteen minutes and provide a rationale for their choice. If you are concerned about what your competitors will do, then 'install' all participants as Board Members of that very competitor, and sketch out a plan of what the competitor would do if their sole objective was to ruin your company. If you want to solve a difficult staff issue, force the same team members to role play both sides of a planned interaction. My personal view is that generation of ideas works best under a time pressure, so force focus and get on with it.

4. EVALUATE

If you want results, evaluation of programs and ideas is obviously of critical importance. But forced focus thinking ensures the right focus is applied in evaluating the right outcome to move forward. No plan is complete without some form of benchmarking and evaluation to keep you honest. Focus on the desired outcome, force yourself to monitor it and most importantly, act accordingly!

Forced focus thinking allows us to translate complexity to simplicity, confusion to clarity, distraction to focus, activity to results. Follow the four steps above as a general framework for problem solving and together with putting yourself under some pressure, you should see a more focused result.

In closing, if you have ever visited Rome, recall the art of crossing the road. If you wait for the traffic to stop, and for drivers to obey red traffic lights you will be there forever. Instead success lies with the people amass themselves into groups and as one, they surge forward, forcing their way across the road, forcing the traffic stops to allow them to pass. They force focus on the outcome, gather a willing team around them, get on with the task at hand and they get a result.

This is the essence of marketing and the essence of commitment. From complexity to simplicity, confusion to clarity, distraction to focus and behaviour to results.