



Dear Publishing Professional,

“Nice guys finish last” is untrue and outdated. People want to do business with companies they can trust. Also in this issue: don’t trust physicists for operational advice, and set up a schedule for review of your tech stack.

The next wave in business: being a human

I don’t mean human vs. AI (also worth considering). I mean human vs. monster.

Here are some depressing statistics about humans. Somewhere between 1-6% of us are narcissists. Machiavellianism is similar, but a little less common. About 1-2 percent of us are psychopaths. Something like 5-10% of us are sadists. The lucky ducks who get all four exhibit the “dark tetrad” – a rare but very deadly combination. Dark tetrad people tend to look at life like this.

If I’m able to take something from you, I can and I will, without apology, because that’s the natural order of things. Besides, you deserve it for being stupid enough to fall for it – or too weak to stop me.

Such people used to be warlords and kings. Now they’re CEOs, cult leaders, and politicians. They pursue their own goals, and too bad if workers or the public get harmed.

We hear examples of these people all the time, but we don’t take them as cautionary tales. We should. The trouble is, that mindset is so foreign, it seems unreal. We can’t relate to that cold-blooded, heartless approach to life, so we dismiss it as an aberration.

It’s not. These kinds of people are disproportionately represented in positions of power.

There’s an opportunity here

It’s more and more common for people to believe **“the system” is led by predators who can’t be trusted** – dark tetrad types – and they’re fed up with it. They believe they’re being used and taken advantage of, and they’re starting to wise up and push back.

Take advantage of this backlash and **become the kind of company that people want to do business with**. Here are some ideas in that direction.

1. No more tricks

A subscription is a perfectly legitimate business model. The customer gets a better rate in exchange for a steady stream of income to the service provider.

That doesn’t excuse all the dirty tricks that are used to get people to sign up for subscriptions that have sneaky renewal procedures. Offers need to be clear and honest, and it has to be easy to cancel.

The same thing applies to sales. It's hard to draw a line between being a good salesman and being a manipulative bastard, but you need to be on the watch for that tendency.

2. Show a bias towards transparency

Do you need to collect data about your customers? That's fine. There are perfectly legitimate reasons to do that. Let's not make it a secret, dark art that we hide from our customers. **Explain what you collect and why.** Part of your decision-making process in choosing to collect any given piece of data should be:

- How does it help my customer?
- What would they think if they found out that I was collecting this?
- How could I explain it so they agree that I should have this data?

How is taking data from people without their consent any better than taking money from them without their consent?

In fact, why not have a page on your website that says "this is what we collect about you and here's why we do it"?

3. Fair return policies

Respect the customer's situation. Businesses that make it easy to return a product or get a refund make it easier for the customer to buy next time. This builds trust.

4. Sincere customer support

It's very tempting to make customer support a profit center where reps are trained to up- and cross-sell, but a big part of Amazon's success is their customer support – which doesn't do that. The Amazon customer support agent is trying to help the customer.

This is especially important for high-ticket items. After you've paid big bucks for a service, you don't want to be upsold, or nickel and dimed, when you need help using the product.

5. Be careful about promoting your virtue

Be a virtuous company, but don't blow a trumpet about it.

A colleague once told me that when people start talking about morals, he gets a tighter grip on his wallet. Narcissists talk about how moral they are. Steer clear of that.

Bad company corrupts good morals

Positions that allow people to collect power, influence, money, and so on, will attract the dark tetrad types. Business is one of those places.

You're not one of those people. But **are you learning from them?**

Have we bought into the idea that profits come first? Have we put the bottom line ahead of our customer's interests? Are we trying to trick people into buying or renewing our product, because it works? Are our offers honest?

I'm both predicting and hoping that **the thirst for honest businesses is a market opportunity.** Be the trustworthy and decent merchant that your customers long for.

Einstein was wrong about insanity

You've heard it many times: "The definition of insanity is doing the same thing over and over again and expecting different results." The saying is often attributed to Einstein. There's no solid evidence of that, but I'll go with it for now.

Is it really "insane" to keep doing the same thing and expect different results? Or could that be the secret to success?

My reaction to the quote is that **Einstein was obviously not a fisherman**. Doing the same thing over and over again and expecting different results is pretty much exactly what you do when you're fishing – for one simple reason. You can't actually do the same thing over and over again because the world has changed since your last cast.

The tide is moving. The temperature and the wind is changing. The sun or the moon might be rising or setting. The fish are moving around. What seems like the "same action" – casting your line – is actually very different each time. Doing the same thing over and over again might be precisely the right strategy. That's **the power of repetition**.

Repetition is also a key to mastery. You've probably heard of Malcolm Gladwell's 10,000 hours rule, which, while it oversimplifies the concept, still makes an important point. Doing the same thing repeatedly can make you better at it.

External conditions may change as your actions remain the same. Market trends, technology, and consumer behavior change over time (like the tides). Sometimes that transforms something that didn't work in the past to a great success today. Electric vehicles might be an example.

Success is about timing. An idea might be too early for the market, but by continuing to pursue it, you may be in the right place when the market catches up. Apple's Newton MessagePad flopped, but it evolved into the iPhone. Sometimes "doing the same thing" is a matter of perspective. Surely someone at Apple reacted to the iPhone as "repeating the mistake of the Newton" and "doing the same thing and expecting different results."

Repeating actions can build habits that are essential for long-term success.

Consistency in effort, like exercising regularly or maintaining a healthy diet, often leads to different and improved results over time.

Some actions have cumulative effects. The idea that people have to hear something multiple times before it sinks in is well-supported by both marketing theory and cognitive psychology. That's the origin of the "Rule of Seven" in marketing. The exact number isn't the issue, but a potential customer needs to see or hear a marketing message several times before they take action. Once again, "doing the same thing" isn't always doing the same thing.

Complex systems create weird feedback loops. The relationship between actions and outcomes is not always linear. Small, repeated actions can trigger feedback loops that eventually lead to significant changes, even if individual iterations seem to have no effect. Something like this might apply to a social media strategy.

Persistence is often necessary for success, especially in the face of initial failures. What might be perceived as "insanity" (or stubbornness) could actually be the persistence needed to overcome challenges and eventually succeed.

"The problem with opportunity is that it comes disguised as hard work." – my brother Dave

Innovation often comes from iterative processes where repeated trials and experiments eventually lead to breakthroughs. Each iteration might involve slight changes or refinements, and the cumulative effect of these iterations can lead to success.

The point is that "doing the same thing" is not as straightforward or simple as it seems. Before you're tempted to say "I have to stop this. I'm doing the same thing over and over again, expecting different results" – be sure to think of these other possibilities.

A schedule and an idea box for your tech stack

It's easy to keep using a service you don't particularly like because the contract is suddenly up for renewal and you haven't had time to think about other options. Try this.

1. Find the contract renewal date for every service you use. Put it in your calendar and set a 6-month reminder.
2. Put all the dates for all your tech services in a single place and keep it somewhere that pesters you.
3. Create a Google Doc (or equivalent) for each service. Maintain a running list of things you don't like about it, features you wish they had, ideas for improvement, etc. Make it simple so that when an idea occurs to you, you can jot it down quickly.
4. Use those lists to re-evaluate your current services and use them as a negotiating tools at renewal time.

And if you need help, call me!

Sincerely,



Greg Krehbiel



P.S. – I recently recorded a session on "**why you don't need a 360 view of the customer**" for the online Martech conference Sept. 24-25. I hope you can watch it.

P.P.S. – I also write a monthly column on that site. **Follow me on LinkedIn** and I'll always provide a link.

P.P.P.S. – If you get value from this newsletter, please do me a favor and **recommend me to a colleague** – especially if they have a marketing technology need, or are curious about CDPs.