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The Path of Least Resistance

By Nan S. Russell

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I spend a bit of time on airplanes. So, I was surprised by what I observed on a regional jet. Yes, it was holiday travel. Yes, the flight was overbooked. Yes, infrequent and tired travelers were creating challenges for the only stewardess. Still, she saw the small boy, no more than eight, seated in the exit row next to his grandfather. She chose to ignore him, wishing and hoping her safety message stating a person must be over fifteen to sit in the exit row would fix it. Maybe she didn't want the hassle of trying to reseat passengers on an already late flight. Maybe she was tired, too. Who knows?

What I do know is that despite the safety implications of her decision, she chose the path of least resistance that day. And she's not alone. Many people take that path at work. They choose the easier way rather than doing what needs to be done. But, the path of least resistance leads away from winning at working.

You'll be on that path if you turn a blind eye to something you know needs solving but you don't want to address it or "rock the boat;" or you let a mistake pass your desk for someone else to catch and fix because it's too complicated or time-consuming; or you ignore a difficult person or a recurring problem because you don't want to create unpleasantness or deal with conflict; or you pass off a poor performer to another department rather than face the difficult conversation; or you resolve the customer complaint without calling out or solving the bigger issues behind it.

In my thinking, that's the adult equivalent of my son, as a child, pretending he never noticed the toilet paper roll needed replacing. He'd leave a sheet or two on the cardboard tube so he didn't have to be the one to do anything about it. Of course no one in the house was fooled. No one at work is either.

In twenty years of management, I've learned that the difference between doing the right thing and the easy thing significantly differentiates people's performance. We can debate what the right thing to do is at any given time. Sometimes, it might be choosing the more difficult, challenging, time-consuming path or the one that comes with more risk. But like my son and that stewardess, I think most of us know what the right thing is most of the time, and we know when we've chosen the easier way.

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In Lee Ann Womack's country hit, "I Hope You Dance," there's a great line that applies as much to work as it does to life: "I hope you'll never fear those mountains in the distance; Never settle for the path of least resistance." You see, if you want to be winning at working, you can't fear the mountains of change, discomfort, conflict, unpleasantness, hard work, or difficult choices.

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Sign up to receive Nan's free eColumn, *Winning at Working*, at www.winningatworking.com. Nan Russell has spent over twenty years in management, most recently with QVC as a Vice President. Currently working on her first book, Nan is a writer, columnist, small business owner, and instructor.

The Tao of Web Marketing

By Michael Southon

The Tao of Web Marketing by Michael Southon

A few months ago I was watching a stream meandering back and forth across a flat plain in a high mountain valley. The stream reached its destination – a small lake – but only after dozens of loops and curves. It occurred to me that Water and clever Web Marketing have something in common – they both follow the path of least resistance.

Let me explain.

Your first contact with a future customer usually starts with an email. It could be an Ad in an Ezine, it could be your Resource Box at the end of one of your Articles, or it could be your Signature File in your correspondence.

But in the chain of events that leads to a web sale, an email is the point of greatest resistance.

Why is that?

Firstly, your future customer is reading your message offline. She or he has to fire up their modem before they can buy your product. And that requires effort (and expense).

Secondly, if your message is in an Ezine, it's probably one of a dozen other messages all clamoring for attention.

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Thirdly, whether your message is an Ezine Ad, a Resource Box, or a Signature File, you've probably had only a few lines to explain why your widgets are so good.

So if an email is the point of greatest resistance, what is the solution?

The ancient Chinese philosophy of Taoism (pronounced 'Dowism') – also known as 'The Watercourse Way' – gives us the answer. Taoism tells us to be like Water and follow the path of least resistance. Water flows. It is soft and moves easily around obstacles in its path, instead of attempting to go through them.

Nothing in the world
is as soft and yielding as water.
Yet for dissolving the hard and inflexible,
nothing can surpass it.

The soft overcomes the hard;
the gentle overcomes the rigid.
Everyone knows this is true,
but few can put it into practice.
(Tao Te Ching, ch. 78)

"What is the path of least resistance in an email?", I hear you ask. Offer something free!

Successful web marketers know this already. I recently did a survey of the Resource Boxes of fifty well known Ezine Writers. Over 90% of them were not trying to sell anything from their Resource Box. In fact, an overwhelming majority were not even trying to get a click-thru to their website – they were simply offering a free subscription to their Newsletter. In other words, they were more interested in building a long-term relationship than they were in making a quick sale.

When I started out on the Internet, I was pretty impatient. I certainly didn't want to follow the path of least resistance. The path I had in mind was more like the flight of an arrow – straight to its target.

But the statistics suggest that most web sales are not made like that; on average your customer will have

to see your message seven times before he or she buys your product.

So next time you plan your marketing strategy, why not take a lesson from Water and follow the path of least resistance?



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