

“Truth & Order Amidst The Chaos”

The Marketing Rebel

RANT

Issue No. 2 *Volume 1*

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Reno, Nevada
Wednesday afternoon

Dear Friend and Subscriber,

Did you go to your high school prom?
I didn't. It wasn't because I couldn't get a date,
either, no matter what anybody else tells you.
Nope. I didn't go because...

My Marketing Skills Sucked!

I may have been the most clueless 18-year-old
in America. Yet, I somehow pulled one of the
great marketing truths of all time out of the
experience.

I was totally focused on Peggy. Really
wanted to go out with her. Practiced my “pitch”
for hours. Had the fantasies all laid out in my
fevered teenage head of how the conversation
would go, how the night might progress.

I was pumped up, prepared and focused.
What we in marketing call “locked and loaded”.

Only problem was... Peggy wasn't on the
market. Peggy, I discovered in horror, was now
attached at the lips to Rick. Bummer, man.

I was crushed, and I gave up. What I didn't
know at the time -- and wouldn't know until the
friggin' ten-year reunion -- was that several *other*
girls were praying that I would ask them out.
Prime prospects, and I didn't have a clue.

I had committed a mortal marketing sin: I
zeroed in on a *single audience* (a list of one, so to
speak), and had no Plan B when Plan A failed.

Fortunately, by the time I reached adulthood, I
had learned not only to have a Plan B, but also
Plans C, D, and E. (And sometimes even F.)
Heck, at one time in the late 70s, I was dating four
different women at the same time. Talk about
data management. But I seldom spent a Saturday
night home alone. (Hey, it was the 70s.)

I call it the “**Pearls On A String**” lesson.
And it is the single most-violated marketing rule I
see among the people who come to me for advice.

Let me use two real-life examples: I have a
very bright client I'll call Dr. R. He had a thriving
multi-headed business when he found me... but
when he started out all he had was a bitchin'
advertisement and one product that he'd slaved
over and developed himself. He went to Jay
Abraham for advice on what to do next for the
business. Jay said, “What do you mean ‘next’?
You don't *have* a business. You have an ad.”

It was a major wake-up call. Dr. R realized
instantly that he was only dreaming he was a real
marketer. He was, rather, a guy who lucked out
by finding a copywriter who wrote him a killer ad
for his lonely, decent-enough product. While
money was flowing in hot and heavy, he felt like
the smartest businessman on the planet.

But when the ad started to fatigue -- as they all
do -- and orders dwindled to nothing, he realized
he had no Plan B. He was at risk of becoming a
one-hit wonder.

Example number two: A current smart-ass colleague I call “The Fortress”. He has never sweated more than a couple of hours over creating any one product -- instead, he spends *all* his time getting very savvy, very quickly, about *marketing tactics*. He always has several projects simmering on the stove at the same time... and he will *instantly* walk away from anything that doesn’t *easily* produce outrageous profits in a short time. And never look back.

The Fortress is a lazy, brilliant marketer. Exactly the opposite of most entrepreneurs, who believe the *product* is the most important part of the mix. Well, it isn’t.

It’s the *marketing* that counts.

The Fortress doesn’t consider himself an expert in any field except marketing. If he wanted to hit the chiropractic market, he knows how to create a great product and advertise it like a champ... regardless of the fact he knows nothing about chiropractors yet. If he decides the tennis market is hot for plundering, he can go after that one, too. At the same time. Never held a tennis racquet in his life. Just knows how to market.

Think of your business as a string of pearls. If the first pearl doesn’t pan out, you simply slide it off the string and toss it... and slide the next one forward. This is not how most entrepreneurs work. They fall in love with their product, consider it their “baby”, and will empty their bank accounts struggling to make it become a home run winner... when, objectively, it doesn’t stand a prayer of even becoming a bunt single.

Don’t get overly-attached to your product. If you want to stay in one market, fine -- but sell a whole *bunch* of products designed to appeal to that market. Have an arsenal of front and back ends going. Don’t get hung up on just one “baby”.

And if you’re really smart, you’ll be constantly testing *other* markets on the side. Remember Dr. R? The guy with one product, and one ad? Well, he got hip a long time ago. And he now has dozens of different products that he successfully sells to many *wildly different* markets. He has broken the code on using a

certain type of “blitz” marketing tactic to slaughter all competition in literally *hundreds* of ripe markets. The ones he *passes up* are hotter than the main target markets of many entrepreneurs.

And even if that first market -- which he loved and wanted so badly to crack -- becomes a three-legged pack mule where profits are thin and the effort to get them too dire... *he will dump it like a used Kleenex*.

Get diversified. Don’t ever risk missing the prom because you never probed other markets.

Salesmanship 101

A key component of great salesmanship is learning how to *bond* with your customer. So he feels good about sending you money.

If what I’m about to tell you seems overly obvious... I want to slap yourself upside your head and repeat these words: “Duh! Of *course* it’s obvious -- that’s why so many people screw it up!”

Don’t hurt yourself, though. Just a mild *thank* will do.

You ever watch a world-class athlete get psyched up for a race, or a game? They get into a “zone” where the world looks decidedly different than it does at any other time. The opposing team becomes the hated enemy, worthy only of humiliation and subjugation. Winning becomes an almost-spiritual obsession. They focus and re-focus on their skills and tricks and game-plans.

They become a *machine* who thinks differently than they normally do.

It’s the same with world-class salesmen. Just before pitching a prospect, they must get into their own “zone”. And start thinking differently than they normally do.

Suddenly... any opinion *they* have is not worth bringing up. What *they* want, or wish for, or desire, is irrelevant. Their *own* needs climb into the back seat.

The **ONLY** thing that counts... is what the *prospect* thinks, wants, wishes for, desires and needs. The world, the sun, the entire universe now revolves around her sales-resistant little head.

I say this over and over, and still people don't seem to get it: The best salesman in the force is often not the handsome devil with the perfect coif and the snappy suit. Nope. Often, the real killer in the bunch is the schleppey, balding little mutt who always looks like he slept in his clothes and sounds like he missed every English class after the fifth grade. It doesn't *have* to be the slob... but it often is. It's the same with winning ads.

Why? Because customers are real people, and they resonate with *other* real people (and stuff written by real people). It's not how you look, but what your SUBSTANCE is. And people will dole out money to salesmen who are friendly, sincere... **and obsessed with making the customer happy.** Really, *really* happy.

Remember -- most people slog through their days in a dark funk. They almost never get to do anything interesting, or go to interesting places, or meet interesting people. They are ignored by marketers who want them to buy their overpriced junk and be grateful for it. They feel disrespected, unappreciated, and taken for granted.

Nobody wants to take the time to listen to their fears, dreams, hopes and needs.

And that's your opening. Whether you're writing an ad, filming a TV spot, or doing some good old face-to-face selling... pull up a chair and get *simpatico* with your prospect.

Don't come on like a corporate robot with any "we have perfected the art of perfection" bullshit. And don't brag, as if anybody cares how proud you are to announce the opening of your next store. And for God's sake, don't lecture, as if you are Knowledge Incarnate and your prospect should be wetting himself just to be in your presence.

Instead... **do a little bonding.** Right off the bat. Let 'em know -- in plain English -- that you hate taxes just as much as they do. That you're at least as big a golf nut as they are. That you share the same headaches, passions, frustrations and joys *they* do.

Let them know you're a human being, you're worth knowing (because you share their views)... *and you have something exciting for them.*

Bonding is not brain surgery. **It's simply putting yourself into a "zone" where your prospect's life, needs and fears are your *only* focus.** Give her some attention. Titillate her with some gossip, or a story that will please her. Don't bully her with your sales pitch -- rather, *seduce* her with benefits, and let her come to her own conclusion to buy from you.

I often tell clients to think of marketing as romance. You sell something in the, say, \$20 range, it's like asking for a date. You start selling stuff over \$99, and it's like going steady. And when you ask for the really big bucks, it's a lot like getting married. The persuasion needed for a date is much less than what's necessary to win someone's hand for eternity.

But it's still persuasion. And that requires bonding.

If you're still having trouble bonding, read the classic "How To Win Friends And Influence People" by Dale Carnegie. I swear your entire life will change overnight. Knowing the secrets of bonding is like having God come down and personally introduce you to folks. **It's the secret of instant acceptance and trust.** When they discover you like what they like, fear what they fear, and consider them the most fascinating person in the world... they will seldom object to giving you money for something you vouch for.

Next month: Why targeted repetition -- even to the point of obnoxiousness -- works so well.

Lessons From The Vice Squad

I have played music in some of the sleaziest dives on the West Coast. I am not joking. I've had a lunatic cowboy launch a full can of Pabst at my head because he thought I was singing about him. (Remember "Third Rate Romance, Low Rent Rendezvous"?) I once had to conk a drunk with my Telecaster as he assaulted my bass player. I've strummed and sung while dancers slugged each other, puked up tequila, tried to have sex, and took advantage of an overflowing bar sink to play Slip n' Slide across the floor (breaking wrists and noses as they slammed into the far wall).

I got so good at playing in the middle of riots that, one night in a Virginia City basement bar, I caught a drunk with my right foot to keep him from falling into my mic stand, stood him up by putting my knee in his chest, and then drop-kicked him back into the crowd... all without missing a beat or botching a chord on my guitar while I sang the chorus of "Brown Sugar".

And you ask: What the heck does any of this have to do with marketing?

And I will tell you: Learning to soothe the savage beast with music isn't much different than using words to persuade him to *buy*. You are dealing, in both cases, with...

The Irrational Side Of A Human Being.

For example: I discovered early on that, while making out a playlist for a gig, every blessed song must either:

- (a) **make 'em cry in their beer... or...**
- (b) **wanna shake their booty.**

The only exceptions are boring weddings (which I refuse to play), or touring with someone who has a hit record (which I have never done -- my gigs have always been bars or dances).

That means, no matter how much the keyboard player wants to do sappy ballads, or how badly the chick singer wants to belt out Broadway hits... *you stick to tunes that pass the test*. If you play something slow, it better have the burly guy with the Harley tattoo wiping away a tear. And no matter how fast a song is, it better be rigged with a vicious back beat that *forces* people to get up and dance. Or you're gonna be playing for the pissed-off bartender and an empty room for the rest of the night.

How do I use this discovery while writing killer ad copy? Easy. Great copy has a rhythm, a grace to it. Essentially, *it bops to an inner back beat*. So you never, *ever* use sentences that aren't immediately and easily understood. Or that interrupt the rhythm. Your reader will not go back and re-read a sentence that baffles him. He will simply move on to something else.

You gotta hook into your prospect's soul, and *get him nodding his head*. Occasionally, I have

written copy that is so right on, readers have shouted in glee as they raced through it. I've seen it. Every fiber of their being wakes up, and a "**bliss dump**" of urgent need and genuine excitement takes over. Much like a kick-ass rendition of "Rollin' And Tumblin'" can ignite a room full of lonely secretaries and uptight executives and get 'em dancing on the tables and throwing ties and bras into the chandeliers. (Yeah, I've seen that, too.)

Or... if you're solving a problem that saves your prospect from a life in Hell, you don't want to dick around with even a sliver of copy that isn't *riveted to the humanity of what he's feeling*. You're both crying in your beer, but not because it's hopeless... rather, you're purging the wound, and offering hope and a better life where before there was only despair.

Why does one band starve, while another has people begging them to play lavishly-funded gigs every weekend? You gotta lay into your audience with exactly what they need and want -- *even if they aren't clear on what it is they really crave*.

This requires you to be a little ahead of your market, and a little smarter. I can't tell you how many times drunks have pleaded for "Free Bird" by Lynyrd Skynyrd. Heck, I've had guys *threaten* me when I refused.

But you can't play it. It's a long, hard-to-pull-off song that gets a few die-hards excited, but loses the rest of the crowd. And you're up there, looking silly for 12 minutes while the call for taxis becomes a din.

Same with your target market. You listen to *no one* but the numbers and your gut instinct (if you have a gut that has proven itself already). No matter how much your partners, your wife, or your lawyer insist that you to do something... if it's not gonna spur sales, *then you don't do it*.

Next month: Cheap tricks to ensure that your bar -- or (more importantly) your customer list -- is *always* crammed with folks bearing fat wallets.

How-To Department

Hey, it's 10 pm.

Do you know where your cash-flow is?

Because of sheer lack of marketing savvy, entire populations of businesses voluntarily shut down the profit spigot, and willingly allow dollars that were headed their direction to suddenly flow back *away* from them.

Yes, this is insane. But it's common.

Why? Because it "seems" to make sense. After all, "everybody does it". It is invisible robbery, and there isn't an accountant in the world who will warn you away from it.

Here's what happens: You're selling widgets at \$39 a pop, and you're doing well. Then, for whatever reason, sales begin to drop.

You decide your widgets need a dramatic rescue to perk up sales again. So, you do what most marketers do and...

Slash The Price!

And it *murders* your bottom line.

You know what I tell clients to do? It's simple: Don't slash the price. Rather... ***increase the perceived value of the deal*** by sweetening it with a ton of free goodies.

So instead of a widget at \$39, your customer now gets (for a short time only) the widget, plus a free report on how to use the widget like a pro, plus an audio cassette interview with Mr. Widget from the famous TV show... *plus* a 2-for-1 coupon for dinner at a local hotspot... PLUS a free tee shirt with a cool widget logo.

All for just \$49.

That's right -- we actually *raised* the price ten bucks. The tee shirt and the free dinner alone are worth twice that. **It's a bargain!**

What did it cost to add all this free stuff? *Almost nothing.* The free report is paper and ink. The audio cassette costs a buck-fifty to dupe, and Mr. Widget did the interview for the PR value. The dinner coupon offers the restaurant fabulous advertising, so you get them free. The tee shirts are a couple of bucks, maybe.

I'm using these items as examples only. To make a point: **Your product is worth what you convince your customer to perceive it's worth.** People respond to free stuff. They love getting things they would *never otherwise be able to find* (like Mr. Widget's autograph). Especially when

there's a story attached. ("Mr. Widget is really a nice guy! He was kissing babies and everything! But he's shorter than he looks on TV...")

I like information-based freebies best. You can pile them on like crazy... and it will cost just pennies to create. Offer *ten* free reports on something closely related to your product. Selling garden equipment? Add reports on growing prize roses, getting rid of gophers, designing decks and fountains and weed-free lawns. Selling a diet? Add info on finding cheap-but-expensive-looking clothes for your new figure... tips on getting free airfare to the Bahamas (because you can now wear bathing suits again)... and maybe a list of little-known places to meet your future soul-mate.

Selling insurance? Add free reports on how to organize your important papers in a simple but easy-to-navigate home-made system. What to do when you can't find crucial phone numbers. How to get the best mortgage rate in the country using the Internet. What to put in an emergency kit in your garage to fix plumbing, electrical and structural problems until the contractor shows up. A thousand and one ways to use duct tape.

Get the idea? **None of this will cost you a cent, if you can write it yourself.** Even if you have to hunt down someone who knows stuff you don't, you can often convince them to do an interview (which you can transcribe) *just for the exposure.*

And that means you don't have to rely on cutting prices -- just like every other podunk business in town -- to bring in new customers. Why do you think Home Depot *slaughters* all other hardware stores? It's because you can go in there knowing zilch about what you need... and they will load you up with brochures, advice, and a clear choice of the right tools for the right job. They offer in-depth (and often free) seminars on remodeling, painting, gardening, even barbecuing. **They are a library that also sells stuff.** At higher prices, too.

Offering lots of goodies makes you more attractive than the competition, even if you're expensive. Offering great information makes you the "**guy to go see**" when your prospect needs

help. Heck, often the prospect buys your product ONLY because he can't live another day without knowing the secrets inside your give-away reports. *The freebies carry the sale.*

People will happily pay more for something they can clearly justify as worth the extra cost. When you start battling the competition by slashing prices, you teach your customers to wait for year-end sales.

Instead, take advantage of your ability to collect (and present in inexpensive ways) amazing "expert level" information. Your cash-flow will thank you.

Next month: How to use the *forgotten magic* of the Bucket Brigade to make your copy impossible to skip over.

Operation Moneysuck

There are a lot of "dark" unexpected consequences to making big bucks. Pains, hassles and nightmares you cannot even begin to imagine until you experience it yourself.

One the most insidious is the "**Golden Handcuffs**" syndrome. It'll tear your heart out.

Here's an example: I had a neighbor -- when I was living in a beachtown near Los Angeles -- who was a cameraman in Hollywood. Sounds like a cool job, right?

Not. He was a second camera operator... which meant he got to shoot all the "filler" scenes in a movie -- the sweeping shots of dawn in the desert, birds flying overhead, the ocean crashing on a deserted beach. All the scenes *without* the main actors, in other words. *Yawn.*

So he would go off for five or eight months to some strange location... and work 16 hour days, seven days a week. Never get to see anything. Never get to talk to anybody but the other bored guys on the second crew. Not have a life for the entire shoot... and then come home, exhausted, and not have a life there, either, because he was scheduled to leave again in a month.

But, man, the gig *paid too well* to quit. He earned almost \$200k a year. Killer benefit package. Enough seniority to guarantee he'd be working until retirement.

And he was the most miserable guy in town. Hated what he did. Hated not having a life. Hated living in dingy trailers on location half the year. Hated the dull "B" movies he helped create.

But he *couldn't quit*. He had no other skills, except knowing how to work the big camera. How the hell could he walk away from such a good-paying job, into an uncertain future?

Golden handcuffs. He was shackled to a hellish existence because the money was "too good" to leave behind.

A thirty-year-old guy, going on eighty.

Is there a moral to this story? Naw. Just an observation. An important one.

I was lucky, in a bizarre way. Through no fault of my own, I was involved in several situations in my teens and early twenties where I came *this close* to dying. Flaming car wrecks, adventurous disasters, hand-wringing close calls. Used up my nine lives before I was twenty-five. Several of my friends weren't so lucky.

Everybody says it, **but few really understand that life really is short.** Even if you live to be 101, it's not enough time. You have been given a gift like no other human in history. You live in an super-advanced civilization, where capitalism and technology offer you the means and opportunity to live like royalty.

Damn it -- you *owe* it to all the poor bastards still slogging through medieval Third World backwaters to live the best life you can here. And no, I'm not telling you to quit your job tomorrow.

Just pinch yourself... and see if you aren't wasting your life, because you believe you'll never earn as much as you do now in any other occupation.

It's not true, you know. The great thing about this economy is that -- with the right tools, skills, info... and a couple of clanging brass balls -- you can carve your own little fortune out of almost *any* market you choose. Nobody assigned you the life you have right now. You stumbled into it, made choices, maybe allowed other people to steer you along, maybe cruised along like water going downhill.

Bette Davis said it best: **“The world is a banquet, and most poor suckers are starving.”**

Just think about it, all right? We get lulled into believing there’s always plenty of time. And there isn’t.

Ship of Fools Department

Okay, enough with the moralizing, already. Let’s talk about *dirty motivations*.

Some of the most powerful drives behind successful people have *nothing* to do with pure desires for money, or a big house, or recognition.

I’ve been asking major players about their prime motivations for twenty years -- often in sneaky ways, lulling them into a trance and digging for the story like a detective on the hunt.

And what I discovered was this: It was almost *never* the desire for big-time riches alone that spurred them along. Rather, it was the desire to earn a massive fortune... **and then rub it into someone else’s nose.**

I am completely serious here. I won’t name names... but I know some world-famous businessmen who became obsessed with success in order to piss off their fathers, or ex-wives, or someone else who doubted them. I’m not talking about a mild resentment here, either -- these obsessions were fueled by *seething bitterness* and *deep-seated emotional stress*.

I call it “dirty motivation”... and it can be the most potent weapon you have when you need to dig deep to overcome the many obstacles in your path to success.

I know whereof I speak, too, because a secret dirty motivation kept me plugging away early in my career. A well-known businessman put out an ad for copywriters, and I sent in my portfolio. He sent it back, saying I “wasn’t ready for his level” of marketing, and suggested I go read Claude Hopkins.

I have seldom felt rage that intense. It was obvious he’d never looked at the samples I’d sent in. Hell, I’d *memorized* Claude Hopkins books. Who was this weasel bastard who dared to treat struggling writers so harshly?

I hopped in my car and was at his office within the hour, ready to rip his lungs out. Fortunately, his level-headed secretary played interference... and I even wound up working for the guy occasionally. But I *never* lost the urge to “show him up”. Every time I hit a new income high, I considered it another notch in my quest to make him regret he ever doubted me. I owe a lot of my success to the bastard.

Sounds childish, doesn’t it.

Works like crazy, though.

Think about hall of fame athletes -- these guys are obsessed with winning, with beating the other guy. No matter how good you are, you *don’t* wanna go up against someone nursing a grudge, or who stays up at night focusing on nothing but ways to clean your clock. Every year, a top-ranked boxer gets a little lazy and loses to some underdog nobody... because the nobody wanted it more. Wanted it so bad, he would literally do anything to win. Train harder, longer, and more exhaustively. While the champ is out enjoying life, the little guy is turning himself into a *seething monster*.

I know a lot of copywriters who are pretty good. But there’s no *fire*. They’re content to slam out so-so copy that’s “good enough”... and hey, good enough copy may get the job done.

But they will never break into the top ranks. There’s nothing pushing them from within. There’s nothing to *prove*.

You got somebody in your life you want to embarrass with your new success? Don’t be ashamed. *Embrace* your dirty motivation. You don’t need to share it with anyone... and you don’t even need to follow through on your fantasies. I never did. Most of the mega-successful guys I know never did. Just succeeding became enough of a victory. Just knowing you did it.

Next month: How to recognize (and what to *do* about) “psychic vampires” who will never, ever let the curtain go up.

Coaches Corner

My educated guess is that there are very few people in America who do not consider

themselves a “coulda” expert. (As in “I coulda done that.”)

As a writer, I’m on the butt-end of this wishful thinking all the time. People (lots and lots of them) feel the ability to write compelling sales copy *must* be pretty simple to pull off -- you know, you just sit down and put pen to paper. How tough could it be?

And, as long as they are never forced to actually sit and write, they retain this fantasy. There’s always one guy in any business I work with who is *outraged* that I’m making big bucks “just scribbling some shit down.” I expect it. I’m actually a little disappointed if he doesn’t go to the guy who hired me and insist that he could write the damn ad himself.

Standard answer from me: **Have at it, Bucko.**

I never try to convince anyone of anything anymore. That’s one advantage of knowing what you’re doing -- you aren’t defensive about attacks. Give ‘em enough rope, they’ll hang themselves.

You gotta watch for this false sense of expertise all the time in your business. Just because you love to eat, doesn’t mean you’re a great cook. Listening to music doesn’t make you a musician. And watching thousands of ads on TV doesn’t make you an expert in marketing.

The **ONLY** way to get good at something... is to do actually *do* it... and *keep* doing it until you stop making “rookie mistakes” and start having confidence that comes from *experience*. There’s no theory on earth that substitutes for experience. If you’ve got someone in your biz who is smug about the way the world “should be”, watch him like a hawk. Critics are not doers -- they are negative forces that can suck the life from a project.

This is why accomplished people have no patience for uninformed criticism. Everybody’s an expert. And their opinion isn’t worth dogmeat.

Most critical people, in my book, are *idiots*. I don’t say this casually -- after decades of dealing with almost every type of human being alive, I came up with a neat way to gauge idiotness. I call it the “**3 Stages of Pure Friggin’ Idiotness**”. Check it out:

1. **Naïve Innocence.** This stage is forgivable. Most good poker players learned the game by getting fleeced by pros first. It’s no crime not to know what fork to use -- we all gotta start somewhere. I’ve been a *huge* idiot often in my career... but only while I was learning the ropes.

2. **Stubborn Ignorance.** Not forgivable. This attitude comes from a flawed world-view, where learning, reading and open-minded thinking -- all *staples* of creativity -- are not respected. There are people out there (some in very influential positions, too) who are absolutely hostile to anything new. They cling to their “opinions” with a death grip.

3. Last is my favorite: **Aggressive Stupidity.** This is the most *dangerous* condition of all. It combines all the motivation and energy of a go-getter... with the brain wattage of a Rottweiler. In my book, it’s okay not to know what you’re doing, as long as you’re upfront about it and be careful. The trouble with aggressively stupid people is... they don’t know what they’re doing, and yet they insist on *doing it anyway*, even as their actions cause havoc. Best example: The activist politician who says “don’t confuse me with facts -- I know what I believe to be true, and therefore it’s the truth. *No matter what.*”

Which, now that I think about it, accounts for pretty much all the politicians we have.

How can you put this insight to use? Well, first off, you can stop believing most people are rational and reasonable. They aren’t. Don’t get mad at people trying to learn. We tend to forget how painful a process it is. But don’t try to convince stubborn yahoos you’re right, either.

And learn to recognize aggressively stupid people *quickly*. Don’t argue with them. It’s like wrestling a pig. You both get dirty, and the pig likes it. You have better things to do.

Next month: Two magic little words that will make you *immune* to the time-wasters in your life.

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