

DIRTY WORDS & DICK JOKES

PARDON OUR FRENCH

We love dirty words.

Shit fuck piss. See? We love 'em. But that's not what we're talking about here. The dirty words you'll find in this book aren't as fun as all that. At first glance, they don't seem dirty at all, which is what makes them so dangerous. These are words or turns of phrase that appear to be useful, but are actually empty, nonsensical, or misleading. They'll fuck you up for sure.

This book points a finger at five of the dirtiest, nastiest ones and aims to help you take them out of circulation.

Oh, and the dick jokes? Those are just for shits and giggles.

HAVING VISION IS CRAP

[Insert cheesy stock photo of a banker with a telescope here]

Not long ago, we heard someone say, “I can really tell the difference between our friends who have vision and those who don’t. And I’m pretty sure I’d be more successful if I had it too.”

There’s no question that vision helps. What’s shitty about that comment is that it frames vision as something you either have or you don’t. But vision is not a gift you’re born with nor an object you possess. It’s not an animal you pursue and catch. Vision is the pursuit itself: a constant questing, a constant questioning, a pursuit of answers that don’t sit still. Vision is a practice.

The practice of being visionary is a matter of looking out as far as possible, setting your sights on a destination in the deep distance, and using that to inform your next small step. It ain’t easy to set your sights, especially when the landscape is dark or cloudy or hazy, but you do it as best

you can, and you take a step in one direction or another. Along the way, your eyes change, and so does the landscape, and this prompts you to reset your sights on a new and presumably better destination. Then you take some more steps and get your bearings again.

Being visionary requires imagination (to dream of new worlds), wisdom (to choose between them), and faith (to persevere in a task that defies certainty and is meant to be “too big”). These are things that every human is born with. So it stands to reason that anyone can be visionary if they choose to practice.

As a practice, vision can be taught. We’re not experts, but we’re gonna give it a go:

The first thing is that you can never stop asking yourself big questions, because the big questions challenge your imagination and wisdom and faith all at once. They force you to look far far out, right into the vanishing point. And it doesn’t matter which big questions you ask—or whether they are abstract or concrete—so long as they are big as can be.

The second thing is that the answers to these

questions will always change, just like you and everything else. But often the answer of the moment will help you answer a smaller, more immediate question.

Easier said than done, mind you.

We're starting with these questions:

What would you do if you knew you could not fail?

If you could change or create one law, what would it be?

If you had 2 minutes to speak to the world population all at once, what would you say?

What would your ideal city be like?

A PIRATE WALKS INTO A BAR.

The barkeep says "Excuse me, captain, but did you know that you've got your ship's wheel stuck in your pants?"

"Aaargh," says the pirate, "it's drivin' me nuts!"

EDGY IS CRAP

So we've written a play. It's a one-act play, and kind of a meta thing.

It's called *I'll Know It When I See It*.

Here's the script:

CLIENT: We need to do a brand refresh. Do you do that? Do you do brand refreshes?

DESIGNER, COPYWRITER, OR OTHERWISE "CREATIVE" TYPE (henceforth to be referred to as DCOO"C"T): Oh, yeah. We're pros. Just fill out our proprietary "Creative Brief" worksheet, so we can get a better idea of what exactly you're looking for.

CLIENT: Stellar. What we really need is a logo that pops. And we want it to be really edgy, which is why we came to you.

Weeks, months, and sometimes years pass.

DCOO"C"T: We think we've really nailed it on this round. Really edgy in just the right way—can somebody get this projector to work?

Weeks, months, and sometimes years pass.

CLIENT: Logos 2, 7, and 32 are getting there. But they don't really say "integrity," "trust," or "innovation," and they're a little too trendy-feeling. We want less "in your face" and more "edge." Do you know what I mean?

Weeks, months, and sometimes years pass. The show goes on forever. Seriously. For. Fucking. Ever.

The other name for this play is *Deja-Vu*, and it's a meta-play because it's being performed right now at creative agencies all over the world by people who aren't even acting. In fact, it's the longest running show on Madison Avenue, even though we wrote it just now.

The problem with "edgy" is that it doesn't mean anything. Which is not to say that people don't mean anything when they say it. Of course they do. It's just that "edgy" means different things to different people, so as a piece of creative direction it's useless. Or worse, it's an epic wild-goose chase, which ends with you getting your ass kicked by a goose that doesn't even exist.

When someone asks you for “edgy”, what they really mean is, “I’ll know it when I see it.” And this is no way to start a project.

It’s worth noting that “edgy” comes in many disguises. Sometimes it’s called “trendy” or “in your face” or “fresh” or any number of subjective things.

No matter the words they use, the client’s gonna need some help turning all those abstractions into things you can work with. So force them to define what they mean. Create a mood-board together. Go for a walk in the city and talk about what you see. Or, if that’s more than the client can handle, at the very least spend an afternoon together ripping into the competitions’ marketing. If you do that, you’ll begin to close the curtain on our tired little play.

Take a bow.

TWO GUYS ARE WALKING IN THE DESERT.

Suddenly, a rattlesnake bites one of them on the tip of his dick.

The other guy runs back toward civilization, and when his cell phone is in range again he calls the doctor.

“Doctor, my friend’s been bitten by a rattlesnake and we’re in the middle of nowhere. What should we do?”

“Well,” says the doctor, “you’ve got to suck the poison out.”

So the guy runs back to his friend and tells him that he talked to the doctor.

“What did he say?”

“He said you’re gonna die.”

CUSTOMER-CENTRIC IS CRAP

Imagine two creative services shops:

Shop A wants to make its clients happy. They focus all their efforts on delivering a kick-ass experience. There's lots of client-services directors on staff, whose sole job it is to make sure the clients feel comfortable throughout the creative journey. Shop A prides themselves on their tried-and-true processes, and their track record of delivering on time and on budget.

Shop B wants to make its clients happy. They focus all their efforts on delivering kick-ass work. They insist that clients work directly with creative staff, who are all chosen partly because they can talk about what they do. Shop B prides itself on its ability to push clients through (and help them learn from) the rough patches of the creative journey, and on its knack for doing what the client really needs even if the client doesn't know how to ask for it.

So which of these shops is customer-centric?

If you read most of the business bullshit out there, you probably said Shop A, and according to the bullshit definition, you'd be right. Congratulations. You get a brown star.

But we take exception to the bullshit definition. Because it should go without saying that you're in business to help your clients and customers. But this shouldn't mean the customer is always right.

Customer-centricity is a matter of putting the work first, even if it makes the client experience rougher. The client came to you for your creative expertise, not for a rimjob. So if you soften your opinions to make the client comfortable, or let the client choose mediocre work, then you're not giving them what they came to you for. And there's nothing customer-centric about withholding value.

If you really care about your customers, you put the work first.

A PROFESSOR ASKS HIS PHYSIOLOGY CLASS A QUESTION.

“What part of the human anatomy expands to ten times its normal size during intense emotion or excitement?”

He picks an overdressed girl in the front row to answer it. The girl stammers, “I’d rather not answer that question.”

The professor turns to the rest of the class. “Okay then,” he says. “Is there anyone who can answer it?”

A boy in the back raises his hand. “The pupil of the eye expands to ten times its normal size during intense emotion or excitement,” he says.

The professor says, “That is correct.” Then he turns to the overdressed girl. “Young lady, two things are obvious from your reaction: One, you haven’t studied the material. And two, I’m afraid sex is going to be a terrible disappointment to you.”

GIVING A PRESENTATION IS CRAP

Presentations are a fact of doing business that you tolerate.

Just barely.

For the presenter, it’s kind of like being a used car and letting your audience kick your tires. And for the rest of us, sitting through a presentation often sucks because there’s no room to really get involved.

Still, lots of people have to give presentations, and lots of people have to listen to them, so it stands to reason that these presentations should be as presentable as possible.

The first step is to stop looking at presentations as something that you give, and start using them as an opportunity to get. You’ve got a bunch of qualified people in the room with you, so why not use this opportunity to get feedback, help, and insight on the very thing you’re presenting?

You do this by treating your presentations as conversations. Because a good conversation builds to a new idea, a shared understanding of something useful that wasn't there before.

Here's a few ways to stop giving presentations and start getting conversation:

Stop thinking of them as an audience.

Because audiences aren't supposed to talk. They're supposed to shut up and listen (remember 8th grade world civics?). This can get super boring super fast. And it does nobody any good. So when you're getting ready for your presentation, think of all the minds you'll have access to instead of all the blank faces nodding in the blue light of your powerpoint projection.

Make them experts.

That doesn't mean handing out copies of your "agenda" and it doesn't mean print-outs of your powerpoint. It means making sure everyone in the room has the tools to take part in the conversation. Telling them what you know, or what you've discovered, or what the data shows is only one half of that conversation. It's merely a way to educate everyone so that they're able to give you the help you need.

Ask the questions you need answered.

Seems obvious, right? But lots of people ask leading questions, questions to which they already know the answer. This doesn't take anyone anywhere interesting. And it doesn't do anything to get people more engaged in the conversation at hand. Instead, ask the kinds of questions that you need help answering. Think hard about how you'll ask your questions to best engage people in the room.

Make it fun.

This is easier than it sounds. Instead of a story about John Smith, tell one about Dick Hertz. Slip an embarrassing picture (of yourself) in with your charts and graphs. Use a curse word or at the very least use #%!@. And don't take it all so seriously. Guaranteed, there's gonna be some awkward moments. So you might as well enjoy them along with everyone else.

FINDING THE RIGHT CAREER IS CRAP

Everyone, at one time or another, has asked this question: What careers are there that can satisfy my creative drive?

The problem is, this is a bullshit question that will only hold you back. Careers are not something you find waiting for you downtown or across the ocean or in a cave like some sort of holy grail. Careers are something you make. You make them with decisions about how you spend your time and effort: which jobs to take (and how long to keep them), what you choose to learn about, what kind of community you participate in, what activities you pursue when not working, and so on. All of these are career decisions.

The question is bullshit because it presupposes that the perfect job for your specific interests and talents is already out there. Not that the question isn't a legitimate and answerable one. It is. Unfortunately, the answer is almost always no.

Still, there's a big difference between a job and a career.

TWO GUYS ARE WALKING OVER THE GOLDEN GATE BRIDGE.

They stop to piss off the side.

“Wow,” says the first guy, “the water sure is cold!”

The second guy responds, “Yeah, and deep!”

Sometimes, your job won't support your career at all. But you can make a whole career in your free time, and that's a good start. It'll be up to you to support it, and you may even need to devote all of your time to it, leaving no time to do paying work. In those cases, you either need to rethink your career, or you're gonna have to pay yourself out of whatever savings you've got. It's scary, but hiring yourself is sometimes the only way to do the work that you think needs to be done. Its value (or worthlessness) will be proven in the practice, and that proof will turn it into a livelihood (or a hobby). Either way, you'll have taken your career into your own hands.

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