

T e c h n o l o g y & P l a n n i n g

The Power of Surprise

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The Power of Surprise

In an increasingly competitive marketplace, how do we win the battle for capturing and keeping a client's attention? Surprise them! What's the relationship between surprise and selling success? Consider the following story...

I met Dr. Anderson and his wife, Sue, at his office. Dan was a successful doctor in a small town. He was planning to retire in four years, at age 62. They owned a successful practice, a small farm, and had saved well. They lived comfortably and did not have an extravagant lifestyle.

After I gathered the data, I illustrated the results. There were no surprises. Given the assumptions we made, they were going to be fine – and they knew it. In a funny way I felt like I failed because I couldn't tell them anything they didn't already know. I definitely had not differentiated myself from the pack. So, I shifted strategies and took a more proactive approach.

"Would you like to see what it would look like if you retired today?" They laughed about what they could do as I made the change. They seemed surprised (and pleased) when they saw they could. (I've come to appreciate and expect that no matter how well off someone is, the sense of surprise and relief when they realize that they can retire comfortably today.)

Then I asked him, "Would you like to see what it would look like if you couldn't sell your practice?" It was like I let the air out of him. I made the change. The result surprised us all - it made a difference but was not as bad as they had expected. As it turned out, small changes to his retirement plan made a big difference – and most anything else he did would not. As we analyzed it, this made perfect sense, but they had never thought about it (see side note). Still the result was not as good as the original scenario. So what next...?

I had to make a decision regarding the next step. I could change the retirement age back, reduce their lifestyle, increase expected return rates, or... come up with more money.

I asked, "What if we sell the farm?" Dan's response was strong and immediate. "No. We are NOT going to sell the farm." (Have you ever tried to get a farmer to sell a farm?) I looked over at Sue. She was sitting next to him with her hands folded with a look that pleaded, 'Please sell the farm.'

I decided to play it out. "Well, let's see what it would look like if you did." As I started to change it, Dan protested. The new graphic popped up. The sale had a dramatic effect. Their net worth soared. Both of them sat for a moment, trying to get their arms around what they were seeing. So, I summarized. "This scenario illustrates what would happen if: (1) you retired today; (2) you were not able to sell your practice, and (3) you sold the farm."

Dan asked, "It would make *that much* difference if we sold the farm?" After a brief pause he said, "Sell half the farm." Their situation still looked very good. He glanced briefly at Sue, then back to me and said, "Put in \$100,000 expense for an airplane." Sue protested. Dan raised his voice and pounded on the table as he said, "If I'm going to sell half the farm, I'm going to get an airplane." I

sur-prise (v): To cause to feel wonder, astonishment, or amazement, as at something unanticipated. **(n):** Something, such as an unexpected encounter, event, or gift, that surprises; emotion excited by what is sudden and strange; anything that causes such a state or emotion.

Side Note: This is not uncommon. Most people don't think of how they will generate income from their assets – because they've focused their entire working life to getting them. There are distinctive differences in both the mindset and strategies for "asset accumulation" and "asset liquidation". Retirement advisors provide a great service by taking people through this 'passage'.

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put the plane in. It still looked good – better than where we started. Dan said, “Retire me in two years – at 60.” I adjusted the retirement age.

It was like the pieces of puzzle coming together. Dan looked at Sue, then me, and said excitedly, “That’s what I want!” I shifted to explain a potential strategy for achieving this. Within minutes, we came to an agreement on fees and I had a new client.

As we wrapped up, I asked them, “Was this helpful for you today?” They answered enthusiastically. “Yes! We got exactly what we wanted. And it wasn’t at all what we expected to see.” As I left, I felt a real sense of accomplishment, and a new respect for the power of surprise.

Science Behind the Process- Dr. Lazenby says....

The relationship between surprise and selling is attention. Getting attention means crossing the brain’s threshold for a “just noticeable difference”. Without surprise, it’s difficult to get and keep attention.

Why? The brain loves the thrill of the unknown. The brain's love of a surprise makes scientific sense. Throughout time, being alert to out-of-the-ordinary conditions has been important to survival. As a result, the brain is wired to consider unpredictable and unexpected events noteworthy. So, the predictability of a situation is directly related to whether we pay attention to it.

What happens when we surprise someone? Showing people things they don’t know or don’t expect is like candy for the brain. It activates the brain’s pleasure center. The Limbic system heats up. Your brain is saying, “Bring it on.” Or that head jerking “huh” in disbelief (guy thing is head jerk...women are more advanced...they don’t need the head jerk).

The Limbic System. Rational and emotional responses are triggered by different parts of the brain. The Limbic system is the part of the brain that is the “seat of our emotions”. Our Limbic system is activated by senses. It’s what is turned on when we say we are “paying attention”. Everything that goes thru the brain goes thru the Limbic system – and therefore triggers emotion.

Emotions Drive Decisions. Most people think of emotions as large and significant events. Most emotions are ‘micro-emotions’, that occur below the surface of consciousness. But they are still very important in their impact on people’s decisions. In the normal brain, there are more neural connections leading from the emotional to the rational than the other way around. So, even when thought feels rational, it is initiated or triggered by emotion. Decisions are only rational in hindsight. But we tend to describe decisions rationally because it’s easier to understand and explain. And it allows us to feel more in control.

Surprise Enhances Memory. If experience is like building a new road, surprise is a new intersection. In the brain, significant events are assigned more connections. The greater the surprise, the more likely it will be remembered, because it will intersect with more events.

Surprise Helps Overcome Inertia. People want to explore the unknown, but may not seek it out actively. Positive surprise helps lead people to do additional exploration.

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Surprise Creates Momentum. Surprise also initiates a snowball effect (a reinforcing loop). Positive surprises build more positives – negative surprises yield more negatives. If you start with a negative surprise, it's harder to recover. This is a natural learning response. Positive surprise builds positive momentum that promotes decision-making and action.

Surprise Reduces Boredom. When it comes to selling, boredom = death. Our perception of time is related to the distance between stimulus and response. It's why time seems to go so quickly when we're engaged in something. It's also why time seems to run so slow when you're watching water boil. Surprise keeps people involved and keep them from tuning out.

As we enter the 21st century, we are reaping the benefits of the information age – practically unlimited anytime access to all types of information. The downside for consumers is information overload – when presented with so much, how do you choose?

The new scarce resource is attention. The challenge for businesses is to capture and keep it. Understanding and applying the power of surprise can be a critical factor in accomplish this and determine your sales success.