

— *The* —

ENTREPRENEUR'S
GUIDE
TO GETTING
YOUR SHIT
TOGETHER.

— *Volume One* —

John Carlton

The Entrepreneur's Guide To Getting Your Shit Together

By John Carlton

*(Author of "Kick-Ass Copywriting Secrets
of a Marketing Rebel")*

Psst... wanna tear down the obstacles standing between you and real wealth and happiness in business, no matter where you're at right now? Step #1 has got to be feasting on the specific advice from Carlton's 30-year career as a marketing and advertising legend.

These tactics are straight from the real world, where they've been tested, proven and deeply appreciated by the vast mob of entrepreneurs who've already been transformed by this man's shocking... outrageous... and very, *very* successful directives on making business pay off while enjoying life at a level unimaginable to most folks...



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What The Big Dogs Are Saying About This Book...

"I've known John for over 20 years, and he's one of the few veteran marketing wizards who has earned his spot as a sought-after, respected guru. We both come from old-school direct response advertising roots, based on how folks are persuaded to buy in reality (not theory), and our respective success in business is the best measure of just how fundamentally critical this kind of advice is. John's other books and materials sit dog-eared from use on too many entrepreneurs' desks to count, and this one should land right on top of that pile.

My full recommendation."

Joe Sugarman
Entrepreneur, top copywriter and innovative marketer.

"As the son and right hand man of Sir Gary of Halbert, I have enjoyed unprecedented access to the world's top marketing geniuses for over 30 years. John is the ONLY person whose advice I always follow to the letter and I'm not alone.

He is now the de facto boss of the copywriting mafia and once you read this instant classic you will see why all the rising stars of sales seek and benefit from his many years of experience. His natural talent for taking your business to the next level is unparalleled.

This book contains the hard-hitting advice business owners pay John thousands of dollars for... and now you too can learn what you need to enjoy epic success. "

Bond Halbert
Marketing genius, copywriter, public speaker and cofounder of Halbertizing.com

"Meeting John Carlton changed the course of my business and life forever. John demolished my original sales copy approach and re-built it much stronger with real foundations. He then introduced me to the most powerful business elements I needed to focus my efforts on. John will directly tell you what to do in the most raw fashion possible. His legend was earned through talent. "

James Schramko
Founder of SuperFastBusiness.com

"I've known John and benefited from his wisdom, insights and unsurpassed copywriting and

marketing know-how for 20 years. Trust me: You have no idea how lucky you are to have come across this book.”

David Deutsch ,
Top direct response copywriter and author, “Think Inside the Box”

"We're still profitably running ads Carlton wrote for us over 15 years ago -- that's how freaking powerful this kind of old-school salesmanship is. I'm amused sometimes watching business owners chase fads and high-tech gizmos... when the businesses that thrive for decades (like mine) rely entirely on solid sales funnels. That's where Carlton shines as a consultant, ad creator and guiding visionary.

Learning what he has to share can mean the difference between failure and shockingly-fun success. This book could save your life. At least make you rich."

Jimmy Curley
Boss-man at FightFast and OHP Direct.

"When I first hung out with John Carlton and Gary Halbert in their hey-day, I thought they were lunatics. My own consulting company was doing extremely well with large corporations, and I was simpatico with old-school marketing tactics... but these nut-cases were causing small riots among entrepreneurs and small-biz owners, by challenging almost everything everyone thought was common sense in modern advertising.

Then I saw the results, and realized that old-school is the way to go. You can hire people to handle much of the technology for your online biz, and you can outsource manufacturing and support... but the all-important sales funnel requires your total understanding of what veteran masters like John do. This book is a perfect initiation into the best marketing tactics you'll ever use in your ongoing quest for maximum happiness and results."

Stan Dahl
CEO Marketing Rebel LLC & The Action Seminar

“John Carlton showed up at a critical time in my career. I was 6 months out of the Dilbert Cube, living on savings and a couple of skinny-cow clients. My writing skills were not up to the task and flailing wildly for a couple of years was not an option. I wrote the check; he started busting my chops. I ripped his newsletters open as soon as they arrived. Within a few weeks I had the Voice of John in my head. He became my new alter-ego for every sales promotion.

My first rewrite doubled response and transformed my career. John's continued to be a major influence and mentor; I sought his advice recently on a mission-critical project. One thing I appreciate most is -- though he has an incredibly distinctive style which is utterly different from mine -- that never kept him from honing MY writing voice and style.

All great mentors are like that - they don't try to make you into an image of themselves. They bring the best out of YOU.”

Perry Marshall

Author of “Ultimate Guide to Google AdWords” and “80/20 Sales & Marketing”

Much thanks to **David “Flashman” Raybould** for his commitment and detailed help in grinding through the many hours required to make this book manifest. It simply wouldn't have happened without him.

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Introduction...

Who The Hell Is John Carlton...And Why Should You Listen To A Word He Says About Getting Filthy Rich And Ridiculously Happy?

Here's the story: I became a successful entrepreneur (and, later, a respected guru for other entrepreneurs) in the simplest way possible -- I dove into the game as the rawest of rookies, made every single mistake possible, learned my hard-knock lessons...

... and then climbed *back* into the ring to take another shot at it.

I didn't have much choice. I began my career clueless about business, with no mentors, no resources, and no help from anyone. And the only reason I was embarking on an entrepreneurial adventure was because I'd been fired from almost every "normal" job I'd ever held. I was a *very* poor fit in the corporate world (and feeling increasingly marginalized socially, as well).

I'm finally comfortable admitting that my career arc is now legendary. As in, literally going from rags and desperation to riches and fame. I now get paid thousands in fees just to chat with clients on the phone... I'm a featured speaker on all things marketing-and-success related at capacity seminars all over the world... my how-to books and courses on advertising are considered "must have" essential resources by top entrepreneurs...

... and I've been so instrumental in changing the way marketing is done that my name is now used as a verb (as in: "Carltonized copy" that grips readers with outrageous stories and killer hooks).

Not a bad legacy for a shy working-class kid from Cucamonga.

However, I was a hard-core *slacker* for the first part of my adulthood... and things didn't change until I woke up one day on a friend's couch with the blinding realization that if anything good was gonna happen in my life, *I* needed to be the instigator.

No one else was going to help.

There would be no miraculous rescue by the universe.

I was sleeping on the couch because, in the prior two months, I had lost my job, my girlfriend, and my place to live, *bam bam bam*. So I was living out of my car, cruising the West Coast and staying for a few awkward days with every friend who had a couch to sleep on. I was thirty, lost and damaged.

And very, *very* broke.

What saved me was nothing more than deciding to finally make a serious stab at elbowing my way into the business world that had been so hostile to me. If I didn't belong anywhere, and wasn't wanted anywhere... I'd just have to *create* a career on my own.

I began my adventure in entrepreneurship with enough cash for one month's rent (for a shabby apartment in Redondo Beach), a beat-to-shit Toyota that required daily fussing just to get started, a manual typewriter with a sticky "F" key...

... and a vague notion that I just *might* be able to figure out how to make some money in my own business as a freelance advertising copywriter... if I dedicated myself to the task.

Mind you, I'd never met a freelance copywriter before. I knew nothing of how to play the game, had no one to get advice from, and in fact was bucking the headwind of friends and family who were *appalled* that I was even trying to get a career like this moving.

You gotta be at least a little crazy to become an entrepreneur. If you ever looked calmly and logically at what you were doing, you'd run screaming back into the safe, warm folds of Working For The Man. Just grab any old 9-5 job, douse all lingering embers of hope for a different life, and get into a groove with as little grief, stress and uncertainty as possible.

However, if you have even a *drop* of entrepreneurial blood in your veins, it's nearly impossible to stop yourself. You are compelled to cut from the pack and go sniff around the riskiest edges of life to see if maybe you got the mojo to succeed.

I made massive, humiliating mistakes from the very first day of my new career... but rather than slinking off to lick my wounds, I dissected what I did wrong, figured out a better way to do it, and blithely strode back out to take another beating.

I only had one thing going for me: The business world isn't run by geniuses. It's a slapdash circus of good-hearted idiots, snarling sociopaths, dedicated loonies, and the occasionally brilliant risk-taker.

And every single one of them can survive **ONLY** if their advertising works... which it mostly does not.

The business world will forever be *starved* for great ads, and if you can translate the chaotic ideas and wobbly sales pitches out there into something that reels in prospects and persuades them to buy...

... then you hold the key to a career that will last for decades, and make both you and your clients ridiculously rich and happy. Even better, you can write ads for your own projects, which is where the *real* money is.

Copy is and always will be the robust *beating heart* of any successful business. You get that part down -- attracting prospects and getting them drooling over the opportunities you have for them -- and it's really hard to screw up the rest of your business plan.

Understanding how to find, persuade and win over customers is the magic sauce of all great marketing.

Now, I didn't start out writing great ads. But I *knew* I was a total rookie, and thus my primary goal was to get adept as fast as possible. I figured I'd better self-educate my sorry ass, so I took a speed-reading course and hit the library... gorging on every tome I could find on business, salesmanship, advertising and marketing.

I spent weeks in there, thinking I *needed* to be well-grounded in all this fundamental stuff because I was going to hit up the local ad agencies and marketing companies using freelancers... and for sure all those guys *must* be steeped in the details of making business successful. Right?

Not so much, it turned out. I was pleasantly astonished when, during my very first forays into the VP's offices to chat about fees and deadlines, I discovered that my little info-orgy didn't just bring me "up to speed" with these so-called experts...

... but instead, it actually put me light-years *ahead* of them in knowing the history, the theories and the specifics of how advertising and marketing works.

I had accidentally given myself the equivalent of a Ph.D. in all things business.

Huge breakthrough. Just that basic knowledge gave me a toe-hold in the business world... and while I was still not yet an expert, I knew that all I lacked was experience and a few more battle-scars. Which all eventually came to me, abruptly and with the excitement and gut-wrenching terror of a real adventure.

It was a simple formula: Prepare as much as possible with available resources, then dive in, ignoring all fears, and learn my lessons well. I seldom made the same blunder twice. And because I poured myself into the gig, I was able to put my fresh discoveries into action immediately.

I really did make every mistake possible. I under-charged and over-promised, I insulted clients and was bullied by them, I agonized over ads that ran into the buzzsaw of lawyers and angry managers who thought they knew better, and I stumbled frequently trying to build a reputation in the dangerously-weird world of Los Angeles advertising.

And then, one day I realized I was at the top of my game. Clients were calling *me*, begging for my attention and lavishing money and perks on my head. Notorious marketing wizards recognized me by reputation and sought out my advice. And, best of all, I was suddenly confident I could tackle *any* marketing problem out there, and create a killer ad that would solve it quickly. My track record glistened.

And *then* – seemingly the next day (though it was decades later) – I realized I had the chops to write a book that was better than anything else out there for entrepreneurs needing serious specifics on creating their own advertising. So I wrote “**Kick-Ass Copywriting Secrets of a Marketing Rebel**”,

and was immediately asked to speak at multiple business-oriented seminars to share my alarmingly simple views on writing great ads and making your bottom line explode.

This happened to be around the time the Web became viable as a marketplace (because online entrepreneurs could finally get merchant accounts, while simultaneously a seismic shift occurred in the buying public's perception of online business credibility).

My book wound up, dog-eared and essential, on the desks of what has become the First Wave of mega-successful Internet entrepreneurs...

... and I was shoved into the role of guru. As the grizzled veteran pro with an astonishing 30-year track record of making ads work like crazy, my advice and tactics became catnip to the sprawling mob of new entrepreneurs out there.

I was serious about helping others, because no one had been around to help me, back when even a simple piece of targeted direction could have cut years off my learning curve. So I created an "insider's club" where you could email your questions and problems to me, or schedule consulting calls, and even get personal coaching from me on marketing and advertising. My main method of dispensing advice, tactics and lessons was a monthly 8-page newsletter dubbed "**The Marketing Rebel Rant**", which I lovingly tended to (writing every single word) for a little over five years.

That's over 60 issues, if you're a math major. It's timeless stuff, needed and essential for anyone in business. Each newsletter was a complete lesson (or several lessons) in getting your shit together as an entrepreneur – how to write ads that force people to buy, how to create business plans that can actually work in the real world, how to use "Operation MoneySuck" to max out your ability to bring in the moolah...

... and how to live life large.

If you do it wrong, a stint in the entrepreneurial world can bring you misery and bankruptcy. But if you do it *right*, then you just might grab a seat at The Feast, where only the daring few in each generation enjoy the expanded awareness, modern pleasures, and undiluted happiness available to those who live with gusto.

Entrepreneurs run on different engines than the majority of the population. Instead of avoiding risk and uncertainty, we eat it for breakfast. We don't work for The Man... we exist outside most of the rules everyone else plays by, and often we end up inventing *new* rules altogether. Where safety is primary for most folks, we seek adventure and fulfillment first.

We're misunderstood, and even held in suspicion by friends and family. We rock boats, we're too big for our britches, and we never accept "no" for an answer.

In every issue of The Rant newsletter, I did my best to lay out a timeless manifesto of guidelines and insider secrets for entrepreneurs who craved success. You, of course, are the best judge as to whether my advice will help you or not.

But you'd have to be brain-dead not to quickly see how awesome most of the strategies and insight in these pages are, no matter where you are in your quest for creating the best life and business possible.

There's no theory here. This is hard-won wisdom after decades on the front lines. You can take my advice into the real world right away, and get busy transforming your marketing and super-charging your quest for a seat at The Feast.

What you've got here is a collection of the best of The Rant – a thick compendium of the most notorious, most sought-after, and most beloved issues, stories, tactics and advice.

Enjoy.

If you crave more afterward, you can always cruise on over to my blog at <http://www.john-carlton.com>.

It was one of the first marketing weblogs created, and there are years of archives plus an ongoing monthly interactive commentary for your enjoyment and enlightenment.

Meantime, why don't you just sample one of the chapters in this book, and see if you aren't completely and rapturously dragged into my world.

Stay frosty,

John Carlton

Foreword:

The Key To Entrepreneurial Bliss

By Joe Polish

Twenty years ago, I was a dead-broke carpet cleaner. I was busting my ass to earn enough for food to eat, while lugging around heavy equipment to clean sub-par apartments, usually reeking of cat pee, in the 110-degree-plus summer heat of Arizona.

Today, I'm an in-demand marketing consultant (standard fee: \$25,000 for a half-day) with a solid worldwide reputation, who has helped turnaround countless small, struggling service business owners (like I was). My client list now includes best-selling authors, celebrities, famous non-profit organizations, and even a few billion-dollar corporations you might recognize.

And it all changed for me when I discovered the power of direct response marketing. I discovered the secrets of making an entrepreneurial adventure pay off.

I literally turned my underwater service company around in a few *months* by learning, and implementing the kind of strategies you're about to discover here in this awesome book. With the right marketing and copy, I quickly multiplied my monthly revenue by 500%, and eventually turned my modest little one-man operation into a mega-successful company that I was able to sell for nice profit.

The key was stumbling across this edgy cadre of brilliant, totally outrageous copywriters who weren't talking about "brand building" or spouting weak marketing theories. Instead, these wild-eyed rebels were busy perfecting real-world tactics to create immediate results (and cash) in almost every business, niche and project they touched.

This was my introduction to John Carlton, arguably one of the best marketing minds and copywriters alive today. (He's certainly the most ripped-off copywriter in the game – chances are, if you've ever succumbed to an ad in the last few years that forced you to admit you couldn't live without the product... it was penned by someone who either learned to write from studying John's stuff, or who just outright ripped off one of his legendary ads. He's been that influential in the direct response world, especially online.)

I've known John for more than 15 years. He's often the first guy I call when I have a marketing or advertising problem or opportunity. What I like about John is that he's *earned* his chops on the front-lines of real-time business, where theories die gruesome deaths and only the tactics that really work matter.

John's career arc is now legendary. He worked closely with one of advertising's pioneering giants, Gary Halbert, during the years when they brazenly brought long-forgotten direct response marketing expertise back into play for small business owners. And he also worked with Jay Abraham and all of the "A-List" direct-mail outfits at the time.

Plus, John was the *first* old-school sales expert to help newbie entrepreneurs make the web pay off, through his now-classic book “*Kick-Ass Copywriting Secrets of a Marketing Rebel.*”

It’s hard to put into words how understanding the tactics of direct response marketing changed my life.

It’s also hard to convey exactly how incredibly valuable and powerful this book is that you have in your hands.

Be prepared. John doesn’t pull any punches. He doesn’t care about being politically correct on subjects critical to business owners. He doesn’t sugar coat.

And the best part is... you’re going to laugh your ass off while you are getting the most important mini-education in manufacturing your own success possible here.

I know many wealthy business owners who treasure everything they’ve been able to find by John... and who keep dog-eared copies of his books and newsletters nearby for inspiration (and for borrowing the specific tactics John shares in abundance).

There is not a business owner or entrepreneur out there that won’t benefit enormously from what’s in these pages. I don’t care how obscure your service is, or how small your town is, or how “different” you think your situation is.

You can make excuses or you can make money. You can’t do both.

So all I can say now is just “dive in”... and take action. And you will see what all of the fuss is about first-hand.

You’re in for a treat.

Joe

Joe Polish is the author of the best-selling marketing program Piranha Marketing, and the founder of the Genius Network Mastermind. He is also the recipient of the “One in a Million” award from Sir Richard Branson for using his marketing expertise to help generate more than two million dollars in fundraising for the non-profit Virgin Unite. His website is at <http://www.JoePolish.com>.

Chapter One:

The List...

Why high-functioning screw-ups dominate the biz world, how to crush your addiction to losing, and “The Imperfect Guy’s Guide to Wealth, Love, Respect and Long Life.”

Turns out the neighbors think I’m a bum.

Now, I’ve never cared much about what people think of me... but jeez. They’re whispering that I’m a gigolo or something.

And it’s all my own damn fault.

See, I take full advantage of working from home. I seldom shave or bother combing my hair, I wear grungy sweats, and I can occasionally be glimpsed though the window wandering around hollering on the phone.

Or, if you somehow get inside the house to borrow a cup of sugar, you may see a shadowy figure (me) hunched over the keyboard in my cave-like office at the far end of the hall, dogs lying at my feet.

A woman once described men as “bears with furniture”. That’s me.

So right off the bat, people are suspicious. I live in a very nice part of town, surrounded by good citizens who keep their coifs coifed, their chins up and their lawns manicured (well, they don’t *do* the manicuring, but every week a small swarm of laborers care for the landscaping like it was precious matter).

And there I am, home all day under mysterious circumstances, with the three-car garage too full of filing boxes to fit the cars in, the yard looking a bit scruffy, and rock ‘n’ roll wafting pure and nasty from open windows.

The bright and beautiful woman I share my life with has a normal career. She gets up early, and leaves the house dressed for success.

The neighbors like that about her.

They just can’t get their heads around the unshaven guy in sweats who doesn’t seem to have a job. They’re pretty sure I’m living off her, like a leach.

Long ago, I learned to never let people know what I do for a living. As soon as they hear I’m a writer, they hit me up for help. (“Hey! I’ve got a great idea for a best-selling book. Tell you what...

you write it, and we'll split the profits 50/50, whaddya say?") (Their idea always sucks big time, by the way.)

Then, if they catch a whiff of the fees I charge clients, they get apoplectic... and even think I'm making it all up.

And God forbid they should see the kind of writing I actually do for clients. The average person out there is just completely clueless about direct response marketing that uses classic salesmanship. You may as well be talking to them in Swahili. ("C'mon. Nobody reads all that copy, do they? C'mon.")

Still, it's even worse when word gets out that I'm a respected *teacher* of copywriting.

Early in my career, a UPS guy rang my doorbell at 5 a.m. -- not to deliver a package, but to give me some copy to fix up for him, cuz he'd heard I was an ad guy. And he had this fascinating (not) side project in direct mail he was sure I would want in on.

The bastard had *stalked* me through the UPS system.

That's when I unlisted my phone number, got a mail drop address far from home for all package deliveries, and stopped telling folks what I do for a living.

My Significant Other has instructions to mumble something about me being a consultant when asked.

The truth is, I probably generate more moolah every time I knock off an overnight gig than many of my working neighbors earn in a month. They would be *stunned* to realize how prized (and expensive) my skills are in the business world.

But, because I truly do not care if they know I'm a high-powered, sought-after, cutting-edge kinda professional... they are left to their own gnarly imaginations.

And I just now, today, realized that most of them consider me a bum who lives off his woman.

It's ironic, and funny. I was in the street (while workmen repaired a water main that had burst on our property) (gee, home ownership sure is fun) talking to a neighbor who was agonizing about writing his memoirs. (He had been an under-secretary in the Reagan administration or something.)

And I was casually giving him the equivalent of a real consultation -- worth \$2,500 an hour if you hire me -- revealing everything he needed to know about getting it done fast and efficiently. For someone who could appreciate what I was sharing, the advice I offered was worth a fortune (and would have gotten the book done quickly).

But for this neighbor (who seemed fidgety and eager to get back to his TV show indoors) it apparently sounded like the raving of a madman.

Because he had long ago fingered me for a bum.

And you don't take advice from bums, do you. Especially if you were a friggin' bigshot undersecretary in the friggin' bigshot Reagan administration.

Once I realized what was happening, I was shocked. Then amused. And then, of course, I decided to write about it.

Cuz there's something to be learned here, for all of us.

Listen: I am obviously incompetent at presenting myself as a go-to guy to strangers. Few "normal" people recognize any leadership ability in me.

Yet, if they were properly introduced to my record, my resume, and my actual skills... the ones with any business savvy would wet themselves getting on my good side fast.

Bums get zero respect.

Unshaven guys in sweats with sloppy habits get *maximum* respect, however... when it is revealed that a single suggested idea or piece of copy from them can translate to some seriously-outrageous results.

And suddenly, you're not a bum anymore... but, instead, a surprisingly attractive eccentric who can command the rapt attention of a ballroom full of people (as I regularly do on the professional speaking circuit).

Yet the truth is: I really am, basically, a screw-up. I have a problem with authority, a dark sense of humor that occasionally offends, a fascination with obscure hobbies, and a tendency to overlook details that gets me in trouble.

I am, essentially, living proof that you can be a HUGE screw-up... and still succeed beyond your wildest dreams.

How can this be?

Easy. We all screw up. It's built into our DNA, and you can't avoid it no matter how much you try. Get over yourself. Humans muck up almost everything we touch.

It's not how much you screw up that counts. Nope. It's how you *fix* your messes that matters.

There are several types of personalities screwing things up out there, and you need to know what you're dealing with if you're gonna last long in business.

For example:

Type #1: Some people isolate themselves from problems, and try to rise above blame. Ken Lay, the

CEO of Enron, comes to mind. “Not my fault,” was his mantra. Wants all the glory of success, but refuses to accept the untidy responsibility of failure. (Several politicians also come to mind, but I don’t want to start an argument. I just want to shed some light on this stuff.)

Type #2: Other people, while being mostly hands-on, over-delegate without proper oversight, and it hampers their success. There are some things you just gotta handle yourself, no matter how much you want to avoid it.

When you let others control parts of the job that are over their head, you’re asking for fraud and mistakes that can sink your business.

It’s happened to many clients I’ve worked with -- they thought they’d found the “perfect” person to handle, say, their media buying.

And then, months later, they realize they are suddenly a million bucks in debt to magazines that aren’t pulling response.

And Mr. Perfect just shrugs and says “Bummer. Sorry.”

If you’re gonna delegate, you must find people who will treat *your* business like it was *their* business. These are rare birds, and you can’t bribe, cajole or force someone to have this type of attitude. You just gotta search for them. (Hint: They are almost never fresh out of college. True responsibility seems to require some serious real-world experience.)

Type #3: Then, there are people who live to bury themselves in solving every little crisis that comes within reach. This, actually, is something the majority of business owners wind up doing... and it’s the opposite of Operation MoneySuck. You’re standing still, too busy fixing stuff to get ahead.

Not good for the bottom line.

The mindset you truly want to have, in my humble opinion, is that of a “high-functioning screw-up”. This means you understand Murphy’s Law (“Anything that can go wrong, will”)... and you hope for things to go right, while preparing for disaster... but... you also stay on top of bringing in the moolah.

It’s a balance, and you have to be conscious to do it. Fully awake, and fully rooted in reality.

Which most people are not.

You must stop expecting perfection -- either from yourself, or your employees, or your customers and clients. It will never happen.

Life isn’t a calm pond -- it’s an unpredictable *ocean*.

So you want to hone your navigation skills, to weather storms, rough seas and smooth sailing with the same Buddha-like attitude.

Even more important... you gotta learn to enjoy the ride, no matter what.

I consider myself a balanced, high-functioning screw-up. I run a tiny office -- it's just me, and Diane in here part-time. Sometimes we goof up, and emails get lost, or we ship to the wrong address, or we piss off customers in some significant way or another.

I just never let it get to me. When we do screw up, I try to fix it, fast and without a lot of fuss. I rely on my reputation when I need a little patience or good will from an aggrieved customer... and since, most of the time, you can expect prompt, serious, and world-class professional-quality service on my end, people are quick to forgive my occasional lapse.

Usually, anyway.

And when they're *not* able to forgive me, then I say goodbye and good luck, and I never look back.

Because I don't expect or demand perfection, and I've learned to enjoy the ride no matter what happens. I don't waste time on lost causes.

Tragedy is not losing a customer because he didn't receive his package in time and got pissed off.

Naw. Real tragedy is having a loved one pass away, or getting bad news from the doctor.

Everything else is just a small bump on the road as you haul ass through life.

It's all about balance.

I still don't care what the neighbors think about me. I enjoy having the secret ace in the hole of being someone they would plead for an audience with, if they only knew. I don't need any new friends, however.

Let 'em think whatever they want.

But I do care what *you* think, and I want to share everything I can to help you live your own life to the fullest.

So, with all this in mind...

... I want to offer up this little list I call "The Imperfect Guy's Guide to Wealth, Love, Respect and Long Life." It's a recital of some of the best tidbits of advice I've picked up in my career.

These little sayings go around in my head like a 32-disc CD changer on random play -- I've used them so often as reminders of who I am and how I got here, that they're sort of like a soundtrack playing softly in the background.

A lot of these nuggets are recycled folk wisdom, much of it is simple and hokey, and all of it matters when you want to move ahead, fast.

When you spot concepts mentioned redundantly, it means they're important enough to repeat.

There is no ranking here, no rhyme or reason for the way I've listed each item. I wrote this list down in a single burst of writing -- it just poured out of my brain as I mulled the idea of being the mysterious "bum" of the neighborhood.

This vapid, focus-destroying consumerist culture can gobble you up, if you don't stay awake and aware. What's funny is that -- for all the struggle that goes on with most people trying to get rich -- the actual path to success is often the *easiest* one to take.

You just choose to wake up, hook into the universe in a powerful, disciplined, good-hearted way... and let 'er rip.

And stop caring what the neighbors think.

Here's the list:

Live below your means. And avoid all debt -- if you can't pay cash-in-full, don't buy it. Let your thrill be in your accomplishments, not the toys you can suddenly afford on credit.

Put aside a healthy pile of "Up Yours" money, so you can walk away from any situation you don't like, and know you'll survive. (Best: Put a year's worth of cash into a safe deposit box. Don't invest it. Cash, in twenties and hundreds.)

Be a good animal. Sweat a little bit every day, sleep well, eat well, purge your system, live like a warrior-poet. You can monitor how healthy you are by walking up a hill.

Don't ignore your sex drive. Letting that puppy clog up can affect your judgment.

Learn some basic self-defense, today. The first thing a mugger does to a mark is knock you down -- most people can't handle any jostling at all, and freeze. The simple confidence of knowing what your options are -- and where the "soft targets" are on an attacker -- can save your life.

Pursue goals that don't require money: Love, expertise in something you enjoy, education.

Travel and hang out in odd places before spending your money on houses or cars. Buy time, and use it. Live before you settle down.

Give something back.

Do the right thing every time, as a habit. If you're not clear on what the right thing is, that means you're facing another life lesson. Figure it out. The test begins now.

Say you're sorry.

Say "I love you" often and without self-consciousness.

Read a book a week. Speed-reading is okay.

Take responsibility for your actions. This simple habit has profound consequences you will learn to enjoy. Fix what you break, clean up your mess, watch your buddy's back.

You want it, you take it, you pay the price. There really is no free lunch.

If what you've done over the past 5 years hasn't worked for you, then change what you're doing. Or the next 5 years will be one long boring re-run of the same bullshit.

Wake up. Challenge your belief systems. It's better to realize you've been wrong for years, than to stubbornly hold onto a delusion that holds you back.

Moderation, mostly. But feast, too, once in a while. This is how you learn your limits.

Stop doing things that don't work. Too many people go through their entire lives marrying the same type of mate over and over again, making the same behavior mistakes, and making excuses for themselves.

Stop making excuses. I don't care how badly your parents, or your teachers, or the system screwed up your head. You're old enough to make the decision to start over and rewrite your script. Nothing will change for you until you do.

Routine is good to get things done. But it can be a trap, too. Every 6 months, change. Get up earlier, or later. Brush your teeth with your left hand. Take a new route to work. Listen to different music. Simple changes can be dramatic, because you re-engage your mind.

Follow through. Finish something today.

Keep a master list of long-range goals.

Engage the universe in your quest: Ask, and you shall receive. Seek, and you shall find. Knock, and the door will open. Dude, I'm telling you it works.

Accept defeat with grace. Learn your lesson, adjust, and plan for victory next time out. Know how to cheat. Don't do it, but understanding the game thoroughly requires knowing how others take advantage.

Work hard, play hard. Think harder.

Just do it. The meek may inherit the earth, but only after the bold are through with it.

Please yourself first. But be a good friend at all times, even if it means sacrifice. Make giving up something to help someone else a good thing in your life... so it is your *choice* to do so, because it pleases you.

It it's critical, do it yourself. If it's not, delegate. Learn the difference.

Don't lie. If you're in a position where you can't tell the truth, learn how to weasel-word your way around trouble or hurting innocent bystanders. But don't lie.

Some things are and always will be out of your control. Stop freaking out about it. If you gotta cry, cry. Don't make a big deal of it. Life has tears built-in.

Don't borrow. Pay as you go. You borrow, you're a kept man.

Right now, you owe someone a phone call. If it's not yet past 8 p.m., make the call, even if your hand shakes as you dial.

Spending time with someone is more important than spending money on them.

Tragedy happens. Learn what we now know about the process of grief and recovery, so you aren't blindsided by it. (Start with Elizabeth Kubler-Ross.)

Be prepared. Even a blazing summer desert dips below freezing at night.

Carry a folding knife. (Not through airport security, of course.) It's the main tool of our species.

Go get lost once in a while. Stop playing it safe. Get dirty more often, too.

Make out your will.

Do the pre-nuptial agreement. Yes, I know the world has never seen a love like yours. Do the pre-nup anyway.

Buy quality and take care of it. But indulge in junk, too, and devour it.

Set boundaries and respect them. Lose people who don't.

Don't try to change anyone. Learn the difference between actual help and co-dependent enabling. Allow people to blossom or fail on their own. This takes ungodly patience, but it's the only way it works.

Stop arguing.

Lead by example, not big talk. In fact, shut up until you've earned the right to talk by honing your chops.

You're going to be an idiot occasionally. Embrace this opportunity for a good story, learn from it, forgive yourself, and try not to make idiocy a common event in your day.

Start a good habit today, and stop a bad one. Smoke one more cigarette, and toss the pack. That's how you quit. Then call the gym and arrange to see a trainer. That's how you move forward.

Your reputation is built one act at a time, and a lifetime of good work can be squandered the same way. Respect is earned by consistent behavior.

Be where you said you'd be, when you said you'd be there, ready to do what you said you'd do.

Fake being confident if you have to. It's good practice, cuz even after you start scoring high on the achievement scale, there will be times of self-doubt.

Struggle is not a bad word. Accomplishment is impossible without it.

Self-righteous people are ALL hiding something.

Intellectually-sound people change their minds when the facts change. Ideology sucks as a lifestyle.

Get a dog. Even better, adopt an older rescue from the pound. God ("dog" spelled backward) will smile on you, and you'll learn things about life and love.

Don't be selfish.

Say "please" and "thank you". It's astonishing how far simple courtesy will take you, and how many obstacles will suddenly pop up when you're perceived as rude.

Turn off the TV and go read.

Listen more than you talk. And when you talk, observe the rules of conversation. If these rules are a mystery to you, go hunt them down.

No politics or religion in a bar.

Don't interfere with people disciplining their kids. Do interfere when clear abuse is occurring next door.

Tip twenty percent. If you've never worked in a job where you had to be nice to rude people, tip even more. You won't start a trend, but you will make someone's day and generate good karma.

Learn empathy. Get a vivid picture of what it's like to walk in the other guy's shoes.

Go the extra mile. Even when no one does it for you.

Eleanor Roosevelt was right: No one can make you feel inferior without your permission.

Sometimes you gotta take one for the team.

What doesn't kill you often makes you stronger. Or, at least, gives you a good story to tell later. Just remember, there was probably an easier way to get the same thing done.

Learn to tell a joke. But don't rely on them. True wit is intelligence and humor, not one-upmanship or memorization.

Not everyone likes you.

Right now is a good time to stop the bullshit. Get real. Take a painful review of yourself, and be honest. Face your faults, and begin the fix.

Did you enjoy that final cigarette? Good. Never light up again. Yes, it will involve some discomfort. So what?

Someone is waiting for you to ask. You know exactly what I'm talking about, too.

We're all occasionally oblivious to the obvious. Double-check everything.

Don't buy stuff on sale. If you need it, buy it. Respect value, not price.

Go ahead and get excited. Don't be that sour bastard who's afraid of disappointment.

Love will always have baggage attached. Get over it. Love is essential to a full life. No matter what.

The simple answer is often the right one. It's also often the wrong one. There are no absolutes. (Except that there are no absolutes.)

The easy way is often the right way. It's also, etc. No one said this would be simple.

Learn your craft, and pay your dues. It won't stop you from being a genius later on.

Relax, for crying out loud. While you think you operate at full potential under stress, you're actually being a jittery jerk. And the quality of your work is suffering.

What people think of you is irrelevant. But how you leave this world matters. Even if it's all futile in the end, play your part as well as you can. Real courage is fear, in action. Play your hand.

No one here gets out alive. Live your life with gusto.

Okay, that's it for now. Incredibly, if you gave me a few more minutes, I could double the size of this list. There's a lot of this stuff floating around in my head.

It isn't there by default, either. I put everything in there, on purpose. When I started out, I probably read one inspirational book for every hard-core marketing book, for years.

But I was never a self-help junkie. Most of the stuff I read was pure crap, and I rejected it out of hand.

Still, when I stumbled on something that resonated with me, I dwelled on it, made a note, and even let it influence my next decision.

It's been a process, becoming someone you can trust.

We sure as hell don't learn it in school. We don't have the luxury of clear rites of passage anymore. This is why we have so many 30-year-old adolescents running around, living in their parent's basement, refusing to grow up.

In other cultures, becoming a man is an event. You hit puberty, they slice up your foreskin, you go hunt a lion, and learn to stay out all night without getting killed. Upon completion of these clear, exact tasks, you are awarded an emblem of your graduation into manhood.

And it's clear what's expected of you from here on out. There's no hand-wringing or existential angst allowed.

The closest thing our wobbly culture has to a rite of passage in our culture is getting your driver's license. Unless you go through Boy Scouts, you never ever receive clear instructions on how to behave. Nothing much is expected of you, and excuses are made for your less-than-stellar behavior.

If I ran the joint, every teenager would be hustled into nasty boot camp-like classes on "real life" as soon as their voice changed. I've worked with troubled kids, extensively, and the one thing I know they crave is order. They WANT some boundaries and rules laid out.

It is tough to live without a code of behavior.

When I hit thirty, I had not proven a thing to anyone yet. I knew only that I was severely uncomfortable with my life... but I was not yet aware that I had the power to change anything.

The whole process of engaging with life seemed vague and chaotic. I was, I now realize, waiting for someone else to come along and point me in the right direction.

Wasn't gonna happen. There were plenty of people willing to help, but they weren't out cruising the streets looking for me. They were just available.

You had to seek. You had to ask. You had to reach out and knock on the damn door.

As hokey as it sounds, one piece of advice (which I stumbled across in an otherwise useless self-help book) hit home with the force of a body-blow: If what I'd been doing over the last 5 years wasn't working, I needed to change...

... or the next 5 years would be a stale repeat.

That started an avalanche of lifestyle changes for me. I embraced change, even when it was difficult and painful. In fact, when I reflect back, it was ALL difficult and painful.

But the discomfort was momentary. And after a while, I barely registered it... because the pure, white-lightning thrill of real change was so much stronger.

When you roll up your sleeves and announce to yourself and the world that you're fed up with the status quo, and you're gonna twist the direction of your life back toward something you actually want...

... it's the most *exhilarating* work you will ever do.

You need to learn to enjoy it on your own, however. Your friends, for the most part, will resist your efforts to change. They'll feel threatened, with good reason. Because, when you start taking responsibility, and stop making excuses, then things start happening, fast and furious, in your life.

And you suddenly have very little left in common with your dullard buddies who remain content to blame their lack of progress on everything but their own laziness.

I had two items in the list about smoking, for a reason. I smoked for ten years. I liked it.

If it wasn't bad for me, I'd be smoking now. There is nothing that replaces the pleasure of sitting back after a spell of writing and lighting up a cancer stick as you revel in your accomplishment.

Smoking was a buddy, a lift, a statement, a cool habit, a pleasurable routine, a crutch and a focus point. It made me feel grown-up, gave me a bit of a rebel's attitude, was something I could count on to calm me down.

And nothing under heaven could ever replace it.

I quit anyway.

If you've ever been addicted to something like nicotine (or alcohol, or drugs) and tried to quit, then you understand the difficulties involved.

It is ALWAYS easier to give in and stop trying to quit. The habit welcomes you back with open

arms. It's a lover's embrace, familiar and pleasurable. The habit forgives your attempted escape, and with a smirk and a pat on the shoulder, seems to breathe life back into you when you return.

Cuz it *hurt* to try to quit. Really hurt. You were irritable, you couldn't sleep, your appetite was all messed up, your skin crawled.

It was difficult to remember why you wanted to quit in the first place. What were the benefits? What were you supposed to do with this new gaping hole in your life, with nothing to replace it?

I still occasionally chew an entire pack of gum at once, which was my chosen tactic for getting past the urge to light up again. And it's been twenty years since I quit.

So, you get the idea. Quitting an addictive habit is tough.

Well, guess what?

Changing your life, so that you start taking responsibility for your actions...

... is even *harder*.

You aren't trained for it. You have no role models. It's a constant struggle, and there are no external rewards right away, so you often wonder why you're doing it.

If you doubt yourself, even a little, you will abandon responsibility and scramble back to your old ways of making excuses and avoiding change.

It's just damn *hard*.

Do it anyway.

I'm here to tell you that you will find a whole new world of friends to replace your ne'er-do-well slacker pals... and you'll enjoy the company more.

I'm here to tell you the path gets amazingly *easier* with every day of change, and very soon your old life will be nothing more than an amusing memory.

I'm here to tell you that very quickly, unbelievable new strength will flood your body -- physically and emotionally and intellectually. Because you're taking responsibility for that to happen.

And I'm here to warn you... you're gonna LIKE the person you become. Even if you no longer fit in your old world, even if you have to learn to work alone and without support for a while, even if you pine for the innocence of not knowing that change was at your fingertips... you will soon know the absolute bliss that change unleashes.

And life will get shinier, your senses will be as sharp as a wolf's, and things will start arriving in

your life like God's own Welcome Wagon fell over and burst open in your front yard.

That's the good part.

There's a darker side to all of this, however.

Let me explain: In the back of my mind, I cannot stop thinking about the state of the world today. I'm not gonna get political on you -- you decide, in your mind and your heart, who you think will lead America best, and then vote.

For God's sake, don't rely on ideology, though. Get real. This is serious.

Because we need leaders, on every level. And you, my friend, are among the candidates.

I'm not suggesting you sign up for a stint in the Navy SEALs... but I am urging you to look at the character-building material I've shared here in a light that includes more than just your business life.

One of my favorite Hollywood eras was the 1930s... partly because the world didn't yet understand the chaos and horror that was about to consume it in World War II. Those old movies tremble with nervous energy and the adrenaline rush of living through huge plot changes in the world.

I think there is much to be learned from history. And I see us in a very similar period right now -- with much chaos ahead.

Business won't stop because of it.

In fact, as an entrepreneur or biz owner, you have a responsibility to continue doing the best you can, to keep the economy moving. We're gonna get through this coming upheaval, eventually... and the strong who survive will have an interesting new world to feed, clothe and embrace.

So when I offer silly platitudes like "carry a folding knife", it's not just quaint babbling.

It's about stepping up and filling a void in American life. We are starving for take-charge leaders who know what they're doing.

Think about your place in the world.

Get More Carlton At The Blog...

If you're enjoying this book, and still have a jones for more...

... make sure you pop over to John's infamous blog at <http://www.john-carlton.com>, and sign in for email alerts on new posts. (There's a library's worth of archives on the site, too.)

The sign-in box is top right. Make sure you do this first, because you don't wanna miss what's coming up...

Chapter Two: How To Murder “Writer’s Block”

Facing down your fears, strangling procrastination, and (huge treat) a very nice n’ easy formula for writing simple sales messages that can make you stupid-rich.

Hey... let's all have an anxiety attack, what d'ya say?

Pass out the chill pills and "mother's little helpers".

Brrrrrrr....

I've been thinking about anxiety a lot lately, because I'm under deadline for a huge damn job. And going through a vicious bout of angst, self-doubt and pure non-specific loathing is -- for most writers -- a critical part of the creative process.

I wish it wasn't.

But it is.

And it begins just after taking on a new project, builds up steam around the time you start fishing around for hooks and headlines... and reaches a spine-gnarling climax just before you send off the finished manuscript to the client.

You are, for the duration of the really intense period of being maxed-out creative, completely Van Gogh-level bat-shit insane.

Remember the first time you called up a girl for a date? The profuse sweating, the doubt, the skin-crawling fear, the almost irresistible urge to just say "*screw it*" and become a monk?

That's the kind of anxiety I'm talking about.

When I was just starting out as a freelancer, this emotional implosion was *alarming*. I thought the anxiety meant I wasn't suited for the gig.

I obsessed on the notion that I might not possess the required steely nerves, or the default ice water in my veins, or whatever built-in attribute it was that James Bond relied on to be cool, calm and collected while he stared down evil and saved the free world.

Writers are, of course, full of stupid romantic notions like this... fantasizing that our job is somehow parallel to that of a secret agent.

As if a stud-muffin like James Bond would ever consider slouching at a desk writing ad copy... or, if he did, apply his super-cool bad-guy-stomping tools to *do* the writing.

As if.

Anyway... during my early efforts at being a pro copywriter, suffering all that anxiety just seemed so... *wrong* to me.

But very quickly, I realized a jangling case of nerves is just one of the many "*gotta do it*" stages of giving birth to really good copy.

It's not exactly like giving birth, of course -- but damn close, I'd wager.

The evidence that this discomfort is built-in is everywhere, once you open your eyes.

Many of the best actors in the world (including dudes like Laurence Olivier, who earned their pay portraying cool characters) routinely barfed up lunch just before entering stage-right. Einstein and Freud and Bucky Fuller were all unhappy campers while fleshing out their big discoveries.

Van Gogh axed his own ear.

And the list of novelists who thrashed about in at least a mild form of existential agony includes just about every single one worth reading today.

You worry and fuss and fret when you're creating something out of nothing.

It's hard-wired into humans.

Just part of the process. If you do it right. (Remaining calm and sane while you write is a sure sign you're not pushing yourself hard enough to care about quality.)

Realizing this stage was necessary alleviated much of the anxiety I had *about* the anxiety... so the bad feelings stopped piling up like a 40-car collision on a fogged-up interstate. (Since I was anxious about *being* anxious, and then got *more* anxious about the *added* anxiety, and on and on...)

I finally realized that -- as the Zen dudes say -- it shall pass.

But not before you go *through* it.

Over the long history of literature (and I consider great copywriting as worthy of inclusion here) there are many stories of writers who did not understand how this stage of hand-wringing played out.

They lacked a larger view of the process, and took the angst *personally*.

Many committed suicide. It's a common plot point in biographies of famous writers (like Hemingway, O'Toole, Kerouac, et al).

Sometimes they went out the quick way, gagging on a shotgun or a handful of pills... sometimes the slow way, pumping alcohol through their system instead of water and abusing themselves with bad living.

Total waste.

For others, the creative grief was just severe enough to keep them from moving forward, *through* the self-doubt stage, and into the next stage: **Pure joy at having finished the job.**

That joy is what keeps the pro going. It's what makes the temporary pain *bearable*.

In fact... I now chuckle to myself whenever I notice the anxiety building up.

"Hi, Mr. Anxiety", I say. "I was wondering when you were dropping by."

And then I usher him out through a side door.

And ignore him.

He's still there, muttering and trying to distract me as best he can. But knowledge makes him *impotent*. I just move right through whatever he throws up in my way.

Now, this concept of moving through obstacles is *critical* for anyone with any ambition at all.

Cuz there are oodles of obstacles out there that routinely stop people dead in their tracks... no matter how much they believe they "really" want to succeed at reaching their chosen goals.

For example: I don't believe in "writer's block", at least not in the sense that's it's anything other than procrastination.

But for writers who don't understand the creative process, fear of the anxiety can create an impassable barrier to sitting down to write.

You stare at a blank page, unsure how to even begin. You doubt, you stress, you cringe at the thought of failure...

... and, unconsciously, an ugly self-defeating notion rises like Beelzebub: Your scaredy-cat brain realizes that you can't "fail" as a writer... if you *never actually write anything*.

Result: So-called "writer's block".

It's bullshit.

Professional copywriters (at least the successful ones) never stare at the blank page, wondering "how to begin".

Because they don't start writing until AFTER they've filled their head with tons of relevant information about the product, the prospect, the market, and everything else about the gig.

Advertising isn't anything like it's portrayed by Hollywood... where writers sit around frowning and chewing up pencils until one of them shouts "*I've GOT it!*" and spouts some six-word slogan that sets the room cheering.

Real copywriting is the deconstruction of marketing goals, and the construction of salesmanship.

You figure out what the product actually delivers -- the specifics, not the metaphysical bullshit that slogans are made of -- and match it to what you *know* (not suspect) the target market needs and wants.

This is where terms like "message to market match" come in handy. You "match" your target audience with the message that you -- through research -- know will strike a nerve.

So, by the time a pro sits down to "write" the ad copy, he's actually just "coating" the page with the ideas that naturally come from knowing what kind of pitch best sells the product or service.

Few (if any) pro writers start with the first word of the headline, finish the headline, move to the body copy, and then write the main pitch in a linear manner.

(Actually, I DO write that way for a handful of clients... but only because I've already written several dozen successful ads for them already, and know how the pitch needs to go. So I can "jam" on the salesmanship, and write just as fast as my little fingers can type. With little editing afterward, too. But this is *rare*, and ONLY a top writer should ever attempt to get away with it.)

Most writers construct the ad in *pieces*.

The headline is one piece. You can start with the head or -- as I often do -- start with the bullets. ("Bullets" are those little nuggets of feature/benefit info you see in good long copy ads, highlighted with a "dot" that looks like a bullet-hole, like this:

- Six ways to make your competition quiver in fear whenever they see your marketing.
- The single most critical secret to capturing your perfect prospect's attention... even if he's only glancing at your copy.
- The little-known reason all great sales-producing-masters love to read crime novels.

And so on. It's old-school ad-speak from the days when typesetters slowly learned how to isolate and identify critical selling elements in ads. For writers, the bullet remains an essential tool for

delivering the features and benefits of a given product to the prospect, so they can make up their mind to buy.)

I like to start with the bullets because the *essence* of the pitch often lies there. After you've explained all the features of the product... and attached killer benefits... then you know pretty much *everything* there is to know about why people should buy.

Unless there's a *clear* hook, like a one-legged golfer, or some other storyline that meets the "*juxtaposition of incongruous compelling sales elements*" rule.

When you are presented the gift of a great hook, then the bullets are an afterthought. So you might want to write out the story first. Add the bullets later, as support material. Then craft the close as a separate piece. (The "close" is where you deliver your offer and push for closing the sale, tying up all the persuasive parts of your ad.)

Why is the close separate? Because, unless the deal IS the hook -- say, for example, you're offering something you know the reader already wants, at a shocking bargain -- the close employs a slightly *different* way of "talking" to the reader.

If you were doing your close in person, you might actually shift position, move nearer to your prospect, lower your voice... all to impart the seriousness and urgency of what you are about to share.

Don't misunderstand me -- your *finished* pitch should read like one long smooth uninterrupted slide down a greased chute.

But you accomplish that by polishing up the sections and using segues (like the "Bucket Brigade") to cleave them together.

However, during the *creative* process -- while you're still miles away from finishing -- you are often working in sections.

So you've got all these pieces of the ad, and each one can be crafted separately, and tied together later.

If you're "stuck" on the headline, no big deal.

Start working on the bullets, instead. No mysteries await you in the bullet section -- if you've done your job, you have already listed the features of what you're writing about, and maybe even dabbled in assigning benefits.

For me, the bullet section is a breeze. I just run everything through the "virtual" prospect in my head, and try to light him up with desire.

It would be a mistake to "outsource" any of the bullet writing. I occasionally use a "slave writer" to

act as a shock troop for me -- diving into the material the client provides first, and writing up dozens of pages of notes on the specifics of the product.

But I write the final bullets myself.

Because within the bullets lays the *essence* of the pitch. And, often enough, the hook, too.

And you should always, at the end of each gig, be culling the list of bullets you have *down* from a vast number to a tight, hard-working crew that makes the pitch sing.

That means your original list should be outrageously long -- much, *much* longer than you will actually need.

It's always easier to work with an abundance of material, and whittle it down... than to attempt stretching out a paltry, starved little list.

All right. After writing out the bullets, go *back* to the headline. A rookie writer will labor under the illusion he should be able to craft a great headline on the spot, first time out.

Nonsense.

I often write *twenty* wildly different headlines just to get my blood moving.

And NONE of those first attempts come close to what I actually use in the final draft.

You just want to get your ideas down on paper at first... to initiate *movement* on the project. And get past those first twitchy urges to procrastinate.

You essentially want to muddy up page after page with every wild, noxious, hare-brained headline you can concoct.

And from the ashes of these strange, oddly-worded first attempts will arise... phoenix-like... the beginnings of the world-class barn burner that will make your ad a success.

Writer's block?

Forget about it.

Total cop-out.

The silly excuse of a rookie.

And... as I carefully explained in the Freelance Course (if you've had a chance to check that out)... rookies are *dangerous*, to themselves and to others.

It's a stage you just need to endure and get through, as fast as possible.

And you do that by working hard, and not taking the growth pains personally.

Quick story: A decade ago, during one of my sabbaticals from copywriting, I attended several prestigious fiction writing seminars. Squaw Valley, up in Tahoe, Sewanee, in Tennessee, many others all over the west coast.

And I learned two very important things.

Important Thing #1 -- I was earning more from single copywriting jobs than even many "successful" authors were from novels they'd slaved on for years.

And...

Important Thing #2 -- Most people didn't really want to BE writers.

Nope. They wanted to have *already written* something and *already* be "accepted" as a worthy writer... so they could bask in what they perceived as the "writer's life".

They were professional dreamers.

Dangerous rookies, somehow content to *remain* rookies forever.

I was stunned by the lack of effort people put into their quest for writing the Great American Novel.

MOST of them were deluded this way, too. They believed with all their heart that a wonderful novel was cooking deep inside them... and all they had to do was find the "magic key" to *unlock* all the brilliance.

And, in their fevered brains, that magic key would allow the novel to just *gush* out some day.

Without effort.

Maybe employing the same gnomes who came out at night to do the shoemaker's work.

For these dreamers, true genius supplanted the unpleasant requirement to sully their hands and actually *do* anything.

They refused to hear what real authors repeated, over and over again: Genius is 1% inspiration, 99% perspiration.

The workshop portions of these seminars -- where we gathered in groups, led by a published author, and critiqued each other's submitted pieces -- were dismissed by most attendees as a bother.

Because, you know, you were supposed to *work* a bit in them.

Many of these self-described writers -- in fact, at some of the seminars, a *majority* -- had logged years in grad school, getting advanced degrees in... writing.

And yet... they often brought NOTHING to the workshop to be critiqued.

After spending most of their life supposedly studying the craft, they had not *done* any actual writing.

There was much talk of "writer's block", and of "being on the *verge* of sitting down and whacking out that damn novel".

But precious little action.

So why did they attend these seminars and workshops? The events were NOT cheap -- several thousand bucks each, and you had to pick up your travel and lodging and meals (and drinking) expenses. (*Lots* of drinking at these events -- hey, if it worked for Hemingway...)

They attended... because they got to indulge in their fantasy of "being" a writer.

They MUST be a real writer.

Because, you know, they were attending a workshop *for* writers.

I was appalled. I avoided the attendees completely, and hung with the published authors... who all wanted to know how to get into copywriting.

Cuz they were sick of being broke.

They also knew the romantic notion people had about the writing life was bullshit.

In real life, it isn't about hanging out with Tom Wolfe, trading witticisms with Dorothy Parker, and drinking till dawn with Jack Kerouac.

The reality is... you isolate yourself away from distractions, do your research, and write.

Nothing glamorous.

Nothing romantic.

Nothing magical.

To anyone not emotionally and psychologically predisposed to LOVING the act of creating literature (or copy) from thin air by sheer force of effort... it sounds very much like one of the main circles of Hell.

Writer's block, for wannabe authors, is really just another version of the procrastination that wannabe entrepreneurs suffer.

You stalk the edge of the pool, bothering people with questions about how cold the water is, how deep it is, what it's like to get all wet like that... *anything* to avoid actually jumping in.

Attend another seminar.

Read another book.

Rewrite your list of goals one more time.

Philosophize about anxiety.

Or just stare at the wall, lamenting the cruelty of a God who gave you ambition and then denied you the ability to move forward.

Anything to avoid reality.

I became a pro copywriter the moment I could no longer stand the anxiety of NOT being one anymore. I just snapped.

I wish I'd snapped a little sooner in life... but I had to go through what I had to go through. Because - - as I've told you endlessly -- I was working without a script, without any help, without a single clue.

People who never risk anything suffer the worst anxiety of all.

I know... because I have felt the nasty pangs of living in fear of risk.

In fact, for the first third of my adult life, I would physically move to another city -- or another state, even -- to avoid commitments.

A single obstacle appearing before me was enough to make me recoil in horror, and split for the nearest exit.

During those wandering years, I "tried" to be a writer over and over again. Penned some nice stuff, too... but never in a disciplined way.

A song here, a short story draft there, a few penciled pages of an ambitious graphic novel over there.

But I only worked when "inspiration" struck. Many creative types squander their lives -- and their talent -- this way... and end up creating nothing of lasting quality or meaning.

Nothing.

And one day, I realized I was setting myself up to become one of those "never did it" old guys who bothered everyone with boring tales of what could have been... if only... if *only*...

If only they'd gotten off their lazy butts and went to *work* at it.

Neither novels nor ads get written by wishing and hoping and praying.

They get done with elbow grease and sweat and dedication... just like everything else.

Many would-be writers are terrified of writing something... because they suspect it will rip away the *illusion* of "talent" they've carefully nurtured.

You can talk a good game, especially over beers, as long as you never have to produce proof.

But you can't talk your way around a piece of shit manuscript.

God, the *anxiety*!

Life is full of it. You're anxious before you get good at anything, from mountain climbing to painting happy little life-like clouds. Like a rookie SHOULD be.

If you're not anxious when you suck, you're not engaging in reality.

With writing, of COURSE your early efforts are gonna gag.

But, if you apply yourself, your next effort will be better, even if only by a bit. And your *next* one after that will be just that small bit better again, and so on.

If, like many people, you see this process as pushing a boulder up a steep hill, then, yes, it will seem daunting.

I prefer John D. MacDonald's mindset. He'd heard that most authors don't get good until their tenth novel...

... so he wrote ten novels in his first year. Just banged 'em out, to get past whatever obstacles awaited new authors.

It worked, too.

He got the kinks out, and remains one of America's most prolific and widely-read authors. (If you haven't checked out the Travis McGee series, you're in for a treat.)

And, I'm pretty certain that one of those kinks he worked out... was learning how to deal with the anxiety of the creative process.

Early on, it can seem hopeless.

Even for proven, veteran writers, the early stages of getting words down on paper can seem like you're going in the wrong direction entirely.

The headline doesn't work.

The USP is all over the map.

The bullets are mushy and uninspired.

It's EASY, at this point, to believe you've lost the magic. You're a failure after all, and any prior success you had must have been a fluke.

This piece will NEVER get done. It's a mess. It's like a car engine taken completely apart and spread out on the garage floor... and you can't find two pieces that fit together.

There's a sinking feeling in the pit of your stomach.

Hell... sometimes, during a deadline's final days, I can't sleep well.

I'm sick of the copy, sick of the product, sick of the client... and sick of myself.

Because writing really is -- at its core essence -- just you and the blank page.

All alone.

Anxious.

The punch line, as I said, is that I now LAUGH at myself when I'm in the throes of self-doubt and nervousness.

I know it's just part of the birthing process. Been there, done that.

I know I'll meet the deadline, and deliver the best copy I'm capable of writing.

But that deadline is still days away, and I've still got to isolate myself another few evenings and grind away at it.

Plump the boring bullets until they sizzle.

Rework the limp headline until it grabs and won't let go.

Punch up the lame-ass close until it becomes a snarling beast that haunts the reader's dreams, forcing

him to do my evil bidding just to get some sleep again.

And polish every word to a bright, hypnotic gleam.

Still... there are times I'd rather just slit my wrists and be done with it.

I really can feel, viscerally, why rookies unfamiliar with the dread and loathing of the process might want to end it all, rather than live with the discomfort.

So let me be clear: **The anxiety *won't* kill you. Really.**

However, avoiding going THROUGH the process of creation -- either by drinking, or procrastinating, or pretending it's not there -- will doom you to suck on sour anxiety for the rest of your days.

The pro knows what he has to do... and just gets *on* with it.

The wannabe will eat himself up from the inside out... never knowing how much the anxiety recedes when you move forward and just face the beasts that scare you so much from a distance.

There's an ironic side-story here, too.

The wannabe often will know more ABOUT the process than the professional. Because he studies it (instead of doing it).

I've talked with guys who had PhD's in literature who talked a great game of "the writing life"... and yet *none* of them could write their way out of a soggy paper bag.

It's the same with music fans, who know all the flotsam and jetsam of an artist's life and work... but who can't play an instrument or hold a tune to save their life.

I'm not knocking it, mind you. I'm a fan, too, besides being a musician. But I felt -- for me -- it was a requirement to learn the craft, in order to fully appreciate it.

Non-writers often ask me how I can write stuff.

They assume it must be "easy" for me, somehow... because it's so tough for them.

They "can't" do it.

Which, of course, is bullshit.

I've helped too many non-writers BECOME writers over the years to believe it can't be done.

You just gotta want it.

Not "really, really, *really*" want it.

But "get off your ass and start *working*" want it.

Huge difference.

Department of Human Weakness

Okay... let's get back to anxiety again.

It's a heady brew, worth studying if you want to rule the world (or just your niche).

One of my all-time favorite cartoonists is George Booth, who is still pumping out absurdist hilarity for the New Yorker and other mags after sixty years of being on top of his game.

He's not for everyone's taste. If you dig Kurt Vonnegut, or Klivan, or Charles Addams, or "Mutts"... then you will "get" Booth.

Otherwise... *zoom*. Probably go right over your head.

No matter.

I just frequently remember -- especially when I'm feeling a bit overwhelmed -- one of his infamous cartoons... and it never, *ever* fails to make me laugh.

Allow me to inadequately describe it: A room of an obviously financially-challenged tenant is filled with dozens of cats, sleeping, batting around the piles of laundry, contemplating the smoking iron (plugged into the light socket dangling from the ceiling), hissing at each other... or sitting patiently next to the bathtub, where our main character is waxing profound.

"Like a duck. Calm and placid on the surface, but paddling like hell. That's me!" he announces to the feline crowd.

He is Everyman, courageously facing up to reality.

Like a duck.

And we're *all* like this poor, overwhelmed schlub, more or less.

Not the cat part.

The wanting to be perceived as calm and placid on the surface... no matter how hard we're paddling to stay afloat.

As if the terrors of modern existence were but a piffle.

Adult life is really just an updated version of grade-school recess, you know. Privately, we're wracked with doubt and worry, desperate to appear above it all.

Desperate, in fact, to be cool. Calm. Collected.

Marketers, take note.

For over a decade, Ban or Arid Extra Dry or some other anti-perspirant used exactly that slogan:

Stay cool, calm, and collected.

Never let 'em see you sweat.

As a species, we tend to avoid partnering up with people who freak out too easily. They're a burden, especially when the chips are down.

Confidence attracts.

A wink. A knowing grin. A firm, strong handshake. Steady pulse. Ice water flowing through your veins, with not a hair out of place.

Of course, like all simple world-views, being "cool" ain't all it's cracked up to be.

I remember having the privilege, once, of watching a very cool negotiator work his magic. People spoke of him in awe because he was, you know, *so* cool.

In the elevator ride to go see the client, this guy winks at me, and tells me to relax. "I eat guys like him for breakfast," he said.

I didn't attend the negotiation -- I had other chores to take care of, and Mr. Cool insisted he worked better alone anyway.

An hour later, he walked up to my desk and tossed the contract at me.

"The drinks are on you, for doubting me," he said, winking again and smoothing his tie in triumph.

Except... um... the contract was all screwed up.

He'd managed to negotiate a WORSE deal than the client had floated to us before Mr. Cool was brought in.

Cool, calm, collected... and a total fool.

How long, I wondered, would this guy get by on clever winks, a confident demeanor... and a brain the size of a shriveled pea?

I've been wary of confident people ever since.

Which has helped me in life and business to an amazing degree... since, like most people, I used to be easily bamboozled by shows of coolness.

As a kid, I craved the title of being too cool to live, just like everyone else.

We couldn't define it... but we knew it when we saw it. John Lennon, JFK, Cassius Clay, the older kid in school with the sideburns and tricked-out Bel-Air and girlfriend insolently chain-smoking Camels...

In all the famous lists by copywriters on what motivates people to buy, though, I've never seen "being cool" mentioned. I'm sure they all thought "being popular" covered it.

But it doesn't.

Cool is different.

In fact, being cool often includes being *unpopular*... at least with the *un-cool* people.

I'm laughing, because I'm running this long reel of memories through my head... of all the mega-rich businessmen I've met in my career who were miserable...

... because they weren't *cool*.

Remember the story I often tell about "The 29th Auto Supply Store"? After a seminar in Miami Beach, I was sipping a tall cool one with some folks at a sidewalk café, watching the palms sway as evening settled over the lapping ocean and an endless parade of gorgeous people strolled by, animated by the sensuous music oozing out of every cruising car...

... and *all* this one guy -- overweight, loathed by his family, friendless, humorless, and filthy rich from owning 28 auto supply stores -- could talk about...

... was opening up his 29th store.

Loser.

Rich, totally un-cool *loser*.

I'm not a slogan man, but this whole subject got me thinking. So I Googled up ad slogans from the recent past, just to see how successfully marketers have plundered the fears of my fellow un-cool countrymen.

Found a great site, too: www.tvacres.com. (As in "Green Acres".) Alphabetical list of slogans going

back a century.

"If he kissed you once... will he kiss you again?" Certs.

"Aren't you glad you use Dial? Don't you wish *everybody* did?" Dial soap.

"Because you're *worth* it." L'Oreal hair color. (Implying that, should you choose not to use L'Oreal, you must not think very highly of yourself.)

"You're not clean until you're Zestfully clean!" More soap.

Jeez... you'd think we're all a bunch of paranoid, clueless rubes tip-toeing around in mortal fear of being perceived as not... cool. Or calm. Or -- *gasp* -- collected.

Oh, wait.

We ARE those rubes.

Paddling like hell.

Side note: My favorite slogan, courtesy of Ball Park Franks: "They *plump* when you cook 'em!"

What the hell does that mean? Why is that a benefit? And yet... I love the *poetry*.

Need More Carlton Advice?

His first course for marketers is a transformational thrill-ride you can devour in a weekend...

... yet, it will completely arm you with the simple-yet-brutally-effective advertising chops required to slaughter your competition and dominate your niche as quickly as possible.

It's called "Kick-Ass Copywriting Secrets of a Marketing Rebel"... and you cannot even imagine yet how much advanced business know-how and specific selling tactics this easy-to-absorb course short-cuts for you.

This is what to do next, and how to do it for maximum results... from creating your first product, to finding and persuading your first mob of deliriously-happy customers, to quickly establishing yourself as the most dangerously-good competitor in your niche.

When you're ready, zip over to John's notorious blog at <http://www.john-carlton.com> and click on the "Kick-Ass Copywriting Secrets" icon in the right hand column (under "Stuff To Buy").

Your satisfaction is, of course, guaranteed. You don't risk anything by seeing what's up.

This is, after all, the same course that sits on so many successful entrepreneurs' desks, dog-eared and well-used as the main resource guide for creating ads and fortifying all marketing channels.

Chapter Three:

Pop-Psych Salesmanship...

The titillating “real reason” most people buy anything, why you’re pissing off the scientists trying to collect behavior data, how your unconscious belief systems turn your brain to mush, and why street-wise salesmen will forever clean the clock of big fancy ad agencies when it comes to closing the deal.

Hey -- who else wants to become the kind of killer salesman who can easily convince otherwise rational people to open their wallets and *give you all their money?*

C’mon, show of hands. Who wants that kind of skill?

You better be waving your hand over your head like a third-grader with a full bladder. Because getting savvy at salesmanship is the beginning and end of getting filthy, stinking rich in this business.

In any business, actually.

And, while the “bad news” is that the basic, bottom-line *foundation* of becoming a world-class salesman involves an “X” factor most people do not possess...

... the “good news” is: If you stick with me, I will *force-feed* this skill into your skull, no matter how thick it may be or how much you squirm and resist.

But... I’m not gonna do it today.

Why not? Because... this “X” factor (if you don’t have it) needs some care and nurturing to bloom. It’s what those of us who own dictionaries call an “intangible” -- a skill that cannot be broken down into easy steps the way, say, learning to grow roses can.

A minority of people instinctively understand this “X” factor. A handful, at most. For everyone else, it remains a mystery until... at a sudden confluence of mental energy and weird spiritual clarity... you “get it”.

I wish there was a less infuriating way to explain this intangible power... but there isn’t. (It’s such an interesting and important topic, that Gary Halbert and I logged over an hour discussing it in “The Scuttlebutt Tapes” – that interview series I hosted at the beginning of my guru career – in a session titled, simply, “Getting It”.)

However, I am not here to tease you about stuff you can’t have yet. If this was a sales pitch, I’d be unmerciful with such teasing... but this is a teaching vehicle, and so I shall teach.

So here’s some more “good news”: The “tangible” parts of world-class salesmanship *are*

extremely easy to figure out. They can be broken down into identifiable steps.

And that is what I want to reveal to you today. It's the "other" half the salesmanship game, and the ability to master this half is at your fingertips.

Here's what I'm talking about: As you may know, I have a bachelor's degree in psychology. It may be the most *worthless degree* you can have (if you want to get a job involving, say, psychology), but I'm glad I have it.

You see, I earned that degree in the early 1970s, when there was still a lot of fun stuff going on. Psychology was going through a severe identity crisis at the time. Half of the field desperately wanted acceptance as a "real" science, with verifiable results and lots of experiments involving rats and electricity and mazes.

And the other half... well, let's just say I was able to earn about 135 credits learning how to meditate, perform Tantric massage, and get in touch with my dream world. (And many of my "other half" teachers showed up to class stoned and wearing goofy caftans the second they secured tenure.) (Hey, it was the early '70s.)

The middle ground between these two extremes became what we now call "pop psychology" -- the examination and explanation of human behavior in ways the general public (that's you) can understand. (It's actually a melting pot of biology, psychology and sociology, with statistically significant polling techniques. Plus, of course, a little mysticism and voodoo.)

For most people, pop psych is all about self-help. I'm okay, you're full of it, men are from Mars, women are from Pasadena, that sort of thing.

But for serious marketers, it is a huge mistake to ignore the *deeper applications* of this middle ground.

Because this is where you'll find all the juicy revelations about *why humans do what they do*.

As in: **Why people buy what they buy.**

Listen up. This is important.

Most of the world-class salesmen I studied under were educated in the "street". They learned to predict and influence people's behavior because they otherwise wouldn't eat. Their income was *directly proportionate* to how well they understood human motivation and desire.

So they paid *very* close attention to the lessons inherent in every transaction they made, whether it was door-to-door or "on the floor". They couldn't necessarily *explain* why people did what they did...

... but they could *predict* behavior with uncanny accuracy.

Street-smart salesmen are experts at selling because they have cracked the code on the big “X” factor -- they simply “get it” at a cellular level. They don’t need to explain it.

Compare this with the “other side” of the advertising world. Most of the executives and creatives at the big-shot ad agencies I worked with were entranced with what they believed was the “science” part of psychology.

And they did entrepreneurs a huge favor by making “focus groups” and “data sampling” a key factor of their research to discover what people wanted.

Why was this a big favor to us? Because... as it slowly dawned on them that their endless focus groups *weren't working*... a whole separate branch of pop psychology emerged (funded by the agencies) to explain what *happened* in focus groups that made the info so unreliable.

A focus group, for the rookies, is a bunch of random people gathered in a room and asked questions like “Would you put blue ketchup on your hot dog?” They generally get paid to answer these questions, and marketers often run with the results without considering that the info might be deeply flawed.

People lie. They also fudge their answers, because they want to “please” the questioner, or want to appear more sophisticated or enlightened or hip than they really are. Sometimes you can get useful info from focus groups -- *sometimes* -- but taking the results without a grain of salt is marketing suicide.

The simple solution would be to take whatever info is gleaned from a focus group...

... and run it by someone with an ounce of salesman's blood in his veins. That, of course, is too “crude” for Madison Avenue and the MBAs who haunt the agencies.

This is all very exciting for entrepreneurs, however. Because, with just a *little* street-savvy sensibility, you can actually use this “newer” pop psych stuff to dramatically increase sales.

You just have to understand how to “translate” the mumbo-jumbo.

You see, the “science” guys hate variables. They desperately want experiments that are repeatable, with verifiable results they can publish next month which will still be verifiable six years hence.

And this simply *isn't the case* whenever humans are involved. If math were a human event, 2 plus 2 would equal 4 today, 5 tomorrow, and equal a banana next week. Humans aren't just unpredictable -- they frequently are *completely irrational*.

This can drive a marketer nuts, if all he does is rely on the scientific data. For example, McDonald's has been losing market share steadily for the last couple of years. Four decades at the top of the game, with a plan that had rarely deviated from Ray Kroc's original vision...

... and suddenly nobody wants to eat there anymore. *Very* suddenly. Subway is now the number one franchise in America.

What changed?

People. The obesity epidemic finally started to hit home. Focus groups told McDonald's this was coming long ago... but all they could come up with was the McLean burger (which tasted like boiled leather) and a desultory attempt at hawking limp salads.

Then, to counter the "made fresh" claims of the competition, they tried micro-waving their pre-made burgers so they'd be served hot. Not a good move. The entire burger chain is now in freefall.

Why? My guess is, somewhere along the line, the company *forgot to promote guys with some real salesman's blood in them*. Because all the information was there. It just didn't sink in, because it wasn't filtered through a salesman's eyes.

Let me break this down for you.

At the "laboratory" end of this drama are neuroscientists who dissect and study the human brain. They can tell you that being exposed to your favorite foods will ignite the dorsal striatum in your brain -- and because it sits next to the main pleasure centers, it's the culprit behind eating addictions. Right below it is the nucleus accumbens, which is like a "feel good" spigot. What turns it on? New things.

New, *improved* things. Sound familiar?

But scientists are lousy salesmen. And they *still* can't tell you why you pick a certain food as your favorite in the first place. Or why you *change* favorites at some unpredictable point in your life.

However, agency-connected scientists obsess about advertising trends, and insist on making wild feeble stabs at explaining them.

For example: A recent study showed that the amygdala (a key part of your limbic system) of young heterosexual males goes into frothing overdrive whenever a photo of a beautiful female face is in view. It's so powerful, that his memory gets "stamped" with the experience.

This, they announce, is why beer ads are stocked with pretty young things.

Well, *duh*.

It also explains a curious story I heard years ago: An insurance agent ran the same small print ad for *years* in the LA Times, getting small but useful numbers of leads every time. One week, just to be different, he added a photo of a beautiful bikini-clad girl to the ad. No caption, no mention of the photo in the copy, no reference to the girl whatsoever. It was simply the same old ad for insurance,

with a risqué new photo attached.

And response *skyrocketed*. It was stunning.

He didn't run the ad again, however. His wife objected, and no amount of new biz could offset trouble at home.

Stay with me here. I'm getting to the point of all this very quickly.

But first, you need to understand what *social* psychologists do. These "data wonks" are my favorite kind of researchers. They get no respect from the neuro-scientists, but often their work bridges the gap between dry numbers and useable tactics for guys like us.

For example, in one study half a group of volunteers were offered a chocolate chip cookie from a jar with ten cookies in it... and the other half were offered one from a jar with only two cookies.

Guess what? The group with the two-cookie jar consistently reported that their cookies tasted better, and felt they were *worth more*.

Now, a red-blooded salesman will instantly recognize this as the foundation of the old "take away" tactic. "This is a fabulous product... but there's only enough for the first 25 who call, so if you don't act right now..."

But what do the whiz-kids on Madison Avenue do with this info? They nod and admit it *seems* to have some relevance to advertising... but for the life of them, they can't manage to put it into *action*.

You know what the most cash-rich, eager to buy, uber-consumerist section of the population is?

The Baby Boomer generation. These are my people, and we're chewing our way through the earth's resources like beavers through redwood.

In the sixties, when the Boomers were just getting up to speed (and starting to earn their own money), advertisers ran everything through the "does it appeal to the youngsters" test. It was the beginning of the end of popular culture ever being aimed at mature audiences.

And it became a *bad habit*.

The Boomers are now *pouring* bucks into the economy, still spending like there's no tomorrow... and yet the ad agencies remain stuck in the "must have youth" mindset. The average ad agency account rep is twenty eight. And she is considered an "expert" at what the market wants.

Hey -- twenty-eight-year-olds consider 40 to be near *dead*. It's inconceivable to them that ancient adults could ever desire *anything*.

And so they pour their client's ad money into young-and-dumb fare on Fox, and ignore the over-35

crowd over at CBS.

Who account for *two thirds* of consumer spending.

So let's bring this mess full circle.

Boomers fueled the success of McDonalds. As kids, their parents could afford to take them out for burgers. As young adults, just the sight of the Golden Arches could still trigger a dopamine dump ("feel good" hormones).

However, as they enter fat, doddering geezer-hood, Boomers are kicking old habits right and left. Very "suddenly", to anyone who hasn't been paying attention.

Maybe it's time for a hip, svelte "Ms." Ronald, huh? Or, at the very least, I predict you'll see some real salads appearing on the menu soon.

But screw McDonalds.

What's really important here is what YOU come away with from this complex rant.

And here is the lesson: **Learn to love pop psychology for what it is.**

For the majority of businesses (and most ad agencies), it's like the mutterings of blind men trying to figure out what an elephant looks like by reporting what they discover from various angles. The result will be something that very much does not look anything like an elephant.

For the savvy marketer, however, pop psych is a *goldmine* of very useful information.

You simply sift it through your salesman's "**bullshit detector**" and "**opportunity alarm**".

I always butcher the quote, but Mark Twain once noted there were always *two reasons* why a man bought anything. There was the reason he would give you. And then there was the *real* reason.

When you look at a guy trying to soothe his mid-life crisis with a brand new Porsche 911, it's easy to figure out his "real" reason. No matter how much he insists it's all about value and excellent craftsmanship.

But it's not so obvious -- and even defies common sense -- when, for example, golfers will buy products that increase their tee shot distance over everything else by a 10-to1 margin.

Unless you were savvy to a study that showed an increase in dopamine production when volunteers were told they'd just hit a 300-yard drive (whether they actually had or not). Which was larger than the "feel good" increase after making a long putt.

Update: I just got off the phone with Gary Halbert. We spent another hour discussing this very

subject. So let me add a couple of new thoughts:

First, while Gary doesn't have a degree in anything, he puts most practicing psychologists to *shame* with his street-wise observations. He's the best example of a guy using wicked salesmanship skills to *force* the world to make him rich.

And he just proved it again, by re-editing that Mark Twain quote I just gave thusly: "The *only* job of our modern brain... **is to justify what our lizard brain desires.**"

Take SUVs. It's really gotten out of hand.

I have a 1994 Explorer I use more or less as a truck for hauling stuff around town. It used to look big to me -- I bought it right after my Camry was totaled in a head-on collision with a Dodge Ram. (They drug my Toyota away with a tow truck, but the Ram suffered only a scratch on the bumper.)

Now, I was very aware *why* I got the Explorer. I wanted some steel around me, after watching the nose of that Dodge chew through the sedan's engine block like a shark, stopping less than a foot away from my knees.

But today's SUVs are like apartment buildings on wheels. The people who buy them also cite safety as their number one reason for the purchase.

But it's bullshit. The new SUVs are the most unstable vehicles on the road. They are literally too big for most of the drivers to handle efficiently. (Especially with a cell phone plastered to their ear and kids screaming in the back seat.)

The "real" reason has been uncovered by the social psychologists: People who buy SUVs are more afraid, more sexually timid, and have lower self-esteem than the rest of the population.

They want the behemoths because...

Their Lizard Brain Needs To Be The Baddest Ass On The Road!

And all that talk about "safety" is just their modern brain making an *excuse*.

All right, I'm through with the examples. (And I'm selling the Explorer and getting a nice little sports car, because the gecko in my head demands it.)

Just get hip to what pop psychology has for you out there.

Easiest: Hit the search engines with some relevant terms (like "advertising experiments" or "marketing research"). Check out James Surowiecki's excellent articles in the New Yorker (he's a regular contributor). Subscribe to Science News. Read the Harper's Index, and follow up on the studies reported there.

I gotta warn you, though: It's addictive.

Most people think they have the human race "figured out" by the time they get out of school. That's silly. Just for the entertainment value alone, you should include the study of human foible and behavior in your "lifetime of homework".

It's fun, and you will never have another boring day whenever there are people to watch.

However, as a marketer... you **MUST** get hip to this bottomless well of incredible information.

The opportunities available to anyone who finally "gets" humans are outrageously profitable.

Whew. I'm exhausted.

I'm gonna go shock my dorsal striatum with a nice cold pale ale.

Tales From The Vice Squad

I lurk (and often participate) in a very cool "internet mastermind" group where feisty marketers share info, ask for help, and occasionally bitch up a storm.

Any kind of mastermind group is good, I've found. You get weird if you hole up and keep the world at bay. I call it the "Ted Kozinski Syndrome". You gotta wander into town once in a while and see what other folks are up to.

Anyway, recently one of the marketers posted a problem he was having, and asked for advice. He'd done a little quasi-illegal fax-blasting (shame on him), and someone took enough offense to sic a lawyer on his butt, asking for \$500.

Now, it was only vaguely interesting to me that a predatory lawyer was available to help some misguided jerk try to sue another small businessman over a trifle. That's "dog bites man" stuff.

However, it was *very* interesting how the mastermind group responded.

Many people -- all of them with their heart in the right place -- wrote in with oodles of advice of how to handle the lawyer.

And nearly all of it was based on a world-view straight out of fairy-tale land.

Look. We all operate under something called a "belief system" that is formed and reformed over the course of our entire lives.

This belief system includes the obvious stuff -- your religious views, your sense of right and wrong, your ideas of what constitutes art and pornography and literature, et cetera.

But here's the kicker: Because of the way we're all wired...

... we have very definite beliefs about many, many subjects for which *we have absolutely no basis to form a belief.*

I'm a big fan of advice columns. They're the front lines of the pop psychology wars, and Ann Landers, Dear Abby and Miss Manners were able to write daily columns for *decades* based solely on straightening out people with faulty belief systems.

People get extremely upset -- and *stay* upset for years -- over stupid little things like their belief a bride can only wear white if she's a virgin (there's actually no etiquette rule about this at all), or that you need to warm up your truck for half an hour every morning (fuel injections systems need no more than 30 seconds), or how a real man should be able to tell -- before holding open a door -- if a woman is a feminist (who is offended by it) or a traditionalist (who expects it).

I find it all vastly amusing, unless I'm on the wronged side. (My idiot neighbor guns his Hummer for 45 minutes every morning.)

The thing to remember -- as a wide awake, alert and *reality-based* marketer -- is that these are *beliefs*, not facts. They are formed under murky circumstances, and often have no solid basis whatsoever. They are urban myths, or old wives tales, or -- even worse -- picked up...

From *Television!*

Back to our little legal drama.

The advice given was based on a world inhabited by Perry Mason and Ally McBeal. In the belief system of these guys, you get a lawyer, who will work night and day on your case, and put him in front of a kindly old judge who will devote hours of deep thought trying to make sure that justice is served. And the jury will be...

Well, let's stop right there.

There won't *be* a jury in a case for \$500. Getting a lawyer will cost you six times that, and he'll double bill you every time he farts.

He also *won't be prepared* when he walks into court, having skimmed over your case on the drive from his office. And the judge won't give a rat's ass about "justice" -- he just wants the case off the docket before lunch.

In short -- *you cannot take advice from anyone who hasn't actually been there.*

There are two types of people in the world: Those with first-hand experience with the justice system in this country...

... and everyone else.

And the stories told by the ones who've *been* there do not fit into the belief systems of those who haven't. They cannot get their minds around it.

And their advice will always be way off-base.

Yet... they will not hesitate to *give* it to you (even if you never ask). Because, the *power* of their belief is strong. They *believe* they know what they're talking about with all their heart.

So write this lesson out and tack it on the wall somewhere: **Never take advice from anyone who hasn't *been there*.** No matter how sensible it may sound, or how fervently they insist it's true.

I grew up with holiday dinners crammed to the rafters with know-it-alls. My entire family solved the ills of the world before desert, and then started in on the personal problems of whoever hadn't shown up.

I remember listening to a table full of adults arguing passionately about the meaning of a *word*. Voices were getting raised, and tempers flaying...

... while a perfectly good dictionary sat untouched on the bookshelf. No need for that, of course. Why, everyone knows what that word means. Well, everyone but you, you little cretin. You don't know what you're talking about. I'll bet you a *million dollars* I'm right! I'm positive of it. I'd bet my life...

Yeah, right.

Never stop with your reality checks. If you have a legal problem, get advice from someone with legal experience.

No matter how many episodes of Law And Order your brother-in-law has seen.

How-To Department

You know, I could go on about belief systems all day long. (At least, I believe I could.)

At certain points of evolution, these systems actually helped hold a community together. Everyone "knew" there were fairies and elves in the woods at night, bathing could kill you, and you couldn't get pregnant the first time you "did it". This, of course, was before the Age of Enlightenment.

Now, however, I think we're definitely sliding backwards.

And the media owns a big chunk of the responsibility for this, for their "if it bleeds, it leads" system of selecting news stories. They honestly feel their job is to continually scare the bejesus out of

everyone, and facts be damned.

Combine this with the observation that increasing numbers of American kids are graduating college (not just high school) *without ever having read a book*, believing we fought the Germans in the Civil War around twenty years ago, and not having a clue where babies come from...

... and we may as well be living in a neo-medieval village.

Interestingly, there is a lesson for marketers in all this.

The media, you see, needs to fill the till every day, just like any other business.

And few people rush out to buy papers with headlines like “City Council Finally Votes On New Color Scheme For Summer Bake Sale!”

However, just last month I ran across this astonishing headline:

**“Flesh-Eating Bacteria
Kills Construction Worker!”**

That’s what I call a “wake up” headline. (Notice, too, the pithiness and careful selection of words. It’s not “Construction Worker Dies After Being Infected With Bacteria That Eats Flesh” -- it’s much more compact, with the power words first. Every word earns its keep.)

Now, never mind that this happened in Boston, over 2,000 miles away from Reno. Who could resist reading such a story?

Scary, huh? This guy catches this bug, and dies.

Well, *buried* in the story -- long after the website for the Center For Disease Control (CDC) is given -- is a final paragraph where a local doctor essentially tells everyone to just calm down.

It’s not really a flesh-eating bacteria -- it’s “necrotizing fasciitis”, which kills organs inside you. *And it’s not even that unusual.* There are ten to twenty cases annually just in Massachusetts.

The reporter, I’ll bet, thought seriously about not putting that last paragraph in the story. Why not keep everyone scared out of their wits, so they’ll continue buying newspapers?

The CDC site, by the way, lists all the symptoms in a gleeful tone, and does not mention anywhere that it is common but rare. And very much *not* contagious. They decided they really *do* want you to keep coming back to obsess on having your flesh eaten by bugs.

The lesson for marketers is this: While the media can get away with this sort of irresponsible reporting, *you can’t*. If you make a claim, and it’s not true, you may very soon have your head handed to you.

People who see my ads for the first time, and then rush off to write their own “killer” headlines, often miss this point.

When I use a phrase like “How Does This 55-Year-Old Golfer, 90 Lbs. Overweight And Crippled With Arthritis, Still Consistently Humiliate PGA Pro’s...”, I am very careful to back it *all* up in the copy.

All of it.

So when a rookie goes out and writes a headline for his insurance biz that reads like the flesh-eating story, for no other reason than he’s trying to shock his readers...

... well, it won’t work.

If you call yourself an outlaw, or a magician, or a movie star... you better be able to back it up. Or you will not just lose customers... but you may lose your business, too.

Tattoo this on your forearm, where you’ll see it everyday: ***Back up what you say!***

You know, there’s more to this that I want to rant about. Americans have always been on the provincial side -- slightly more gullible than, say, Parisians, and barely more knowledgeable than dirt farmers in the sub-Sahara.

This is still the greatest country on the planet. I believe the U.S. is the culmination of the vague hopes and dreams of the first guy, centuries and centuries ago, who looked around at the powerful kings and warlords telling everyone what to do...

... and thought “Why shouldn’t *all* of us be as free as they are to think what we want?”

It was a tough climb to finally shed all the despots and theocratic bastards along the way... and we are by no means free and clear of future nightmares. That’s why savvy people get so pissy about the Constitution and Bill of Rights. You start chipping away at our rights, and it’s sayonara for democracy, dude.

I’m not talking about wars and terrorism, either. I’m talking about the fabric of our culture.

Top marketers have always known that their best customers are readers. People who *read*. Magazines, books, ads, the “crawl” along the bottom of the cable news shows. People who *read*, think.

And you need people who think, not just to keep the country vibrant and alive... but to keep your business humming. Sheep eat whatever’s under their mouth. Readers -- thinking people -- will bond to you as a fellow thinker, and stay loyal to you for life.

The media in this country, though, seems intent on *killing* all free, informed thought. They want to tell you what to think (and, thus, what to buy and consume). And, to a horrifying extent, it's working.

Remember the AIDS panic of the eighties? I know people who stopped having sex altogether, convinced they would catch the disease just by kissing. Hell, it said so in the major magazines! (I also know at least one guy who stopped masturbating, too. Said he didn't trust where his hand had been.) (I suggested he use a condom, and calm down.)

Yet, for nearly the entire reign of hysteria, the insiders in the media knew the truth: There were (and are) certain groups with very specific behaviors, like sharing needles or engaging in risky sex, who drove the statistics through the roof.

Yes, it's a bad disease. But you're not going to catch it from a toilet seat.

Or take crime. When I lived in Los Angeles, my favorite golf course was deep in East LA. Often, my buddy and I were the ONLY white guys on the links.

Now, if all you knew about East LA came from Hollywood movies and sensational stories in the newspaper, you would think we were taking our lives in our hands.

And we weren't. The black staff treated us with respect and humor, the food was great... and we were always teamed up with a couple of very interesting minorities who never ever had a problem with us. And this was not a country club. It was a lower-middle class public course, bordered by flood control, freeway and cheap houses.

Mind you, we never stuck around to hit the nightclub across the street after the sun went down... but then, I've seen fights break out in lily white upper crust joints, too.

And remember the "chances of a woman over 40 getting married are equal to dying in a plane crash" stories?

All fabricated, based on a *purposeful misreading* of faulty statistics. Same with all the other "scare" stories that sold so many papers over the last few years.

My point is, it's *very easy* to frighten people when you own the only newspaper in town.

And few reporters have the *cojones* to challenge "common wisdom", or rock the boat.

It's startling to realize that kids are growing up today without rival newspapers. Few large cities have more than one main newspaper anymore, and the rags in small towns (like Reno, for example) were long ago consumed by the chains, like Gannett or Murdoch's rabid empire.

Radio? Forget about it.

With Congress bending over and letting special interests have their way, most markets will soon have

exactly ZERO independent stations. Right now, all but one of the rock stations in town are owned by Clear Channel -- the disc jockeys record their patter in Texas, and the programming is purposefully meant to be like elevator music. You will hear the exact same songs and deejays in Seattle, Atlanta, Buffalo, Tulsa and San Jose.

Okay, I'm getting into politics here, and that's not my job.

But I've always had a serious contrarian streak in me, and I suggest you cultivate one, too.

You don't have to be a snarling curmudgeon like me, always bitching and moaning about the decline of civilization.

But you *do* need to be hyper-aware of what's going on.

Things are changing rapidly now -- much faster, and with much more dramatic consequences than at any other time in history.

You think the light bulb or the atom bomb changed things? We will soon be looking back on the days of AIDS and crime-ridden cities as the "good old days".

So stay frosty. There will always be opportunity, and there will always be a need for writers who can craft a killer sales pitch.

Carpe diem, dude.

Need More Carlton Advice?

His first course for marketers is a transformational thrill-ride you can devour in a weekend...

... yet, it will completely arm you with the simple-yet-brutally-effective advertising chops required to slaughter your competition and dominate your niche as quickly as possible.

It's called "Kick-Ass Copywriting Secrets of a Marketing Rebel"... and you cannot even imagine yet how much advanced business know-how and specific selling tactics this easy-to-absorb course short-cuts for you.

This is what to do next, and how to do it for maximum results... from creating your first product, to finding and persuading your first mob of deliriously-happy customers, to quickly establishing yourself as the most dangerously-good competitor in your niche.

When you're ready, zip over to John's notorious blog at <http://www.john-carlton.com> and click on the "Kick-Ass Copywriting Secrets" icon in the right hand column (under "Stuff To Buy").

Your satisfaction is, of course, guaranteed. You don't risk anything by seeing what's up.

This is, after all, the same course that sits on so many successful entrepreneurs' desks, dog-eared and well-used as the main resource guide for creating ads and fortifying all marketing channels.

Chapter Four:

“We’re All Gonna Die!”...

Internal biochemical dumps, freaked-out stress junkies, self-flagellation as a career decision, and the most infuriating advice you’ll ever hear.

Plus: Oops, your cover’s blown...

There's an extremely vicious mental disease running rampant through the ranks of top business owners and entrepreneurs.

At its worst, it is literally culling the field by *killing* people.

And even in its most benign state, it's ruining lives and forcing horrible decisions and sucking the joy from what should be the best years of your life.

I know a lot about this mental disease -- and how deep it runs in the population of top marketers -- because I've enjoyed a pretty wide-ranging view of the business world over the years.

I've slaved at the bottom of the pile...

... felt the sting of realizing your former co-workers are now gossiping about you, after getting booted into middle-management...

... sat in meetings with a mob of gazillionaires and movers-and-shakers as a freelancer...

... been intimate friends with Hall of Fame experts (and seen how they handle the loneliness of being on top)...

... and, relaxing after doin' our thang at some big deal seminar, shared personal war stories with some of the most famous gurus alive.

If anyone else has had a better inside view of modern life in the entrepreneurial and small biz trenches, I'd like to meet them.

And one thing I did, during this entire life-long odyssey, is pay attention to the nuances of how everyone around me chose to live their lives.

Key word there: *Chose.*

Life is all about choice.

And easily the most infuriatingly-unnecessary choice too many people make... is to allow STRESS to dictate how they live their lives.

Here's a bulletin: Stress does NOT make you more efficient or more productive.

Rather, it is a mental disease that will not only chew up your ability to think straight... but it is also a biological bomb that will devour your health.

And the kicker is this: In every single case of over-the-top stress I've witnessed...

... it's clearly a CHOICE made by the hand-wringer himself.

They don't *recognize* it as a choice. It feels like something thrust upon them.

And they often cannot believe there could *possibly* be another way to handle things.

You've heard the slogan: If you remain calm while everyone around you is freaking out... you're just not clear on the *gravity* of the situation.

That's actually a joke... but way too many people take it seriously.

They have ONE reaction to dealing with life: Stress. Whether it's a crisis or a routine deadline... every molecule in your body is put on high alert, and you just go frigging *crazy*.

And I'm here to tell you there is an easy, and much more relaxing, path to take.

You'll never erase stress from your life -- it's part of your biology.

But you can choose to not be *ruled* by it.

This is an important subject, because I encounter both rookies and veteran business owners who spend their entire day drenched in sleep-deprived sweat... and when I suggest that the *first* step they need to take to get their mojo on track is to stop with the stress, they get very confused.

If these stress-junkies were isolated cases, that'd be one thing.

However, they're the *majority* of people I deal with. Some just allow a low-end panic to hover over them... and these are the easiest ones to fix quickly.

But other people start each day by automatically flipping on the stress switch... and they are literally eating themselves alive from the inside out.

Plus, of course, the stress isn't doing anything to help either their lives *or* their business to run more efficiently or successfully. They believe they're doing the right thing, vaguely... but they're actually hurting their own efforts.

So, let's review some basics:

First: **Stress is bad. Really, really, *really* bad.**

The chemicals generated internally by stress are dumped from the most primitive part of your brain -- the hypothalamus and the pituitary gland. Ancient man lived in constant danger, and the ability to quickly shock your body into "fight or flight" action was once a very good thing.

In REAL emergency situations -- like awaking to a burning house, or encountering Godzilla while strolling through the park -- a little stress-hormone discharge can be welcome.

But in modern life -- where you aren't in danger of needing to bolt into caves to avoid tigers, or scramble in a blur after stumbling into nests of snakes -- all those stress chemicals are just slow poison.

The main culprit is cortisol. If you remain unfazed by the prospect of ulcers, diabetes, or heart disease -- all directly attributable to uncontrolled floods of cortisol -- then perhaps you'll better appreciate the fact that this nasty biochemical is behind most cases of obesity, chronic fatigue and headaches.

For starters.

Oh, and backaches. Physical therapists are pretty certain that most back problems stem from our primitive minds wanting to get away from the "danger" of the modern workplace -- because we were not designed to sit for hours at desks performing tasks we despise -- and our willful refusal to flee the situation.

So your poor back muscles are screaming for action -- "*run away, run away!*" -- while you bathe them in a corrosive hormone soup that melts the very fibers that support your spine.

We're all affected by denial in one way or another... but stress junkies seem particularly in thrall to *denying* there's a problem here.

But denial is a choice, too, whether you wanna admit it or not. And denying that stress is killing you means you've chosen to live with an OPTIONAL gulp of poison each day.

Think about that.

I vividly remember standing in line at San Francisco airport as a college student trying to get home during a massive west coast storm that had closed many airports and backed everything up. I was upset, sure, but it seemed pretty obvious that many of the easy options were simply not available -- LAX (my destination) was socked in with fog, and planes weren't flying.

Nevertheless, the older gentleman in front of me in line was screaming at the poor airline desk jockey, telling her he HAD to fly into Los Angeles this minute, and why the HELL was everything so fouled up and...

And, mid-rant, he suddenly clutched his chest and keeled over. Doctors were summoned, but he looked dead to me.

Seemed like a fairly dumb way to go, getting pissed off at Nature. You may as well go to the shore and demand that waves stop crashing.

But the guy was a stress junkie, self-programmed to blow a gasket. I think about him often... especially when I feel my own stress levels kicking upward.

Life is short enough as it is. You can't stop stress totally, but you can at least choose your battles more carefully.

Second: **Stress builds on itself, like a little Sim City inside you.**

Stress also acts like an allergy... meaning, you get MORE sensitive to it the earlier you're exposed, and the longer you allow it to dominate your personality.

So, you're excused for being in the grip of a stress habit, if you've never given yourself a reality check to understand the choices you're making regarding freaking out.

I came across a study of World War II veterans... which showed that soldiers who had been prisoners of war -- a very stressful situation -- showed something like four or five times the cortisol levels of soldiers who merely experienced combat. And this was years after the war had ended.

However, this doesn't mean it's a hopeless situation. Or predetermined.

It just means that -- if you've got a serious stress problem -- you need to get on *top* of it right friggin' NOW.

You need to CHOOSE to start de-escalating your self-poisoning.

Cuz it's not gonna slow down on its own, and like allergies it will get worse the longer you ignore it.

Third: **It's a habit.**

It may not *feel* like a habit... but it is.

Humans are the only animal in the kingdom capable of generating stress out of non-stressful situations. That big brain of yours can get very good at creating soul-murdering anxiety over future events that may or may not happen.

Have you ever engaged in "awful-izing"? That's a term used by shrinks to describe the unnecessary act of obsessing on the *worst possible* outcomes and consequences of any problem.

In Hollywood, it's the guy in the horror movie who snaps and starts yelling "*We're all gonna DIE!*"... until the hero slaps him out of it. After which, the stress junkie collapses into a puddle of sobbing hysteria.

Most folks aren't quite so dramatic about it... but they succumb to awfulizing just the same. It will kill your sense of having other choices and options... and keep you from rationally assessing the REAL situation.

That's not good.

Fourth: **Again, stress does NOT make you more efficient or productive.**

I've seen it over and over again (because I've been paying attention): The same exact situation that pushes the stress junkie over the edge... can be handled by someone else in a *calm* manner.

Without the biochemical dump. Without the crazed look and mannerisms. Without any hand wringing at all.

Here's a challenge most stress junkies cannot believe is possible: The next time you gotta do something "stressful"... have a goal of doing it *minus* any stress.

Just don't stress over it. Make calm decisions, after rationally judging the options available. Focus on the task at hand, and refuse to freak out.

Perfectly reasonable advice.

Probably impossible for most stress junkies to take, though.

I remember a cartoon where a shrink slaps his patient and yells "Just snap out of it!" The caption: Time-saving, single-visit psychotherapy.

That's funny.

In real life, it can be tough to "just snap out of" a life-long habit. You may, in fact, be perversely *addicted* to stress chemicals.

I remember one colleague -- back when I was a "crisis intervention counselor" for institutionalized kids (one of the most stressful jobs I've ever held) -- who told me he didn't WANT to get rid of his ever-present headaches.

He was, in fact, not comfortable unless his brain was throbbing. That was his comfort zone. He knew how to act to get things done in that state.

He wasn't very efficient or pleasant to be around... but just like sky divers crave the adrenaline rush, he craved the nerve-tingling alertness of cortisol.

He died of a brain hemorrhage before he reached his early thirties.

So the task should be fairly clear: No matter how addicted you are to stress... no matter how sensitized you are to it from early trauma that has been building on itself for decades... and no matter how deep you are in denial about your slow-suicide...

... you need to do something NOW to change course.

First, you gotta realize that other people aren't trying to trick you -- there are a lot of us out there who do NOT launch a panic attack the moment things get hairy.

It's entirely within your power to turn the stress spigot OFF.

It might take some effort. But you aren't going to earn a seat at the Feast until you get this job done.

Stress is killing you, making you inefficient, and murdering your enjoyment of life. Just get straight on that.

It doesn't matter how much guilt you're carrying around, or how much shame and fear from past traumas seem locked-in to your personality. And it doesn't matter how far gone you believe you are right now.

You can *choose*, starting today, to change course permanently. Just like a life-long smoker can finally put the butts down for good. Just like the alcoholic can choose to live without booze.

And, just like those serious addictions, once you know you have a choice, you can't hide behind denial anymore. Your cover's been blown.

You can choose to remain in thrall to your addiction... and be pissed off all the time, panicked and fearful, engaging in road rage and busting up inanimate objects that affront you.

Or, you can choose to change.

You've got oodles of options to get busy on this life-saving task, too.

Here, ironically, is a checklist of some of them:

1. I know you hate the concept... but exercise burns up cortisol like putting a match to lighter fluid.

I give out a lot of advice to marketers, and often I just flat out tell certain folks to go pay for a trainer at a gym.

Don't trust your own motivation for getting regular exercise -- when you're paying for an appointment

whether you show up or not, you tend to show up. I've had a personal trainer for years now. I hate exercise. I do it anyway.

And guess what? It's extremely cool to be in good shape.

Plus, I'm able to relax a thousand times easier.

2. Massage is NOT a dirty word, no matter what George Carlin thinks. (He used to obsessively trash therapeutic massage in his act, because his only brush with massage was through seedy New York parlors that featured acts other than relaxation.)

I discovered the "make the world go away" powers of real (not sexual) professional massage as a young man, and treated myself to sessions whenever I could afford it. When I went freelance, I made weekly massage a *priority* -- specifically to keep stress levels low.

And I've continued getting hour-and-a-half massages weekly for twenty years.

You wanna know what my secret is for remaining calm in the face of chaos, and for being such a laid-back guy with a clear mind most of the time?

Massage. It physically moves you into a super-relaxed state... allowing your entire system to release toxins, to stop holding on so tight, and to achieve that same lithe state of functional bliss that *cats* settle into so easily.

You don't like to be touched? It tickles? Or it hurts?

Fine. You may need to start with other relaxation methods first, to reduce your body's resistance to massage. Your system is so overtaxed from being on high alert all the time, that you're a ticking, twitchy bomb.

But really... if you can afford a professional massage, and you enjoy deep relaxation... and you aren't doing it regularly...

... then *slap* yourself immediately. Hard.

And go get your tension-wracked body rubbed down.

Massage, I'm certain, has kept me from getting ulcers, allowed me to breeze through stressful situations with a grin, and shown me how to slip into a state of joyful looseness, whenever I choose.

This is my highest recommendation, for anyone involved in business. Very few people follow this advice, because the Western world remains highly suspicious of pleasure and relaxation and zoning out.

The folks who do follow this advice never stop thanking me, however. Future generations, less hung

up about hands-on physical therapy, will view stress junkies who avoid the easy solutions like massage as idiots.

3. **All the meditative buzz-phrases of the sixties are still operable.**

There is no one "best" way to meditate... which isn't a problem, either, because there are dozens of cool ways to get to the same place.

That "place" is simply a distraction-free feeling of well-being, with all your senses invigorated, and all the flotsam and jetsam of modern life put on hold.

I've written about my own favorite meditation routine several times.

(Short hand version: Sit quietly, close your eyes, and run through your non-visual senses. What do you *hear*, exactly? Not "birds"... but "Four birds, one next door with a 6-note song, three over at the park squawking, probably geese..." What do you *taste* in your mouth? Your tongue has areas that register bitterness, sweetness, saltiness, and other basic tastes. We're usually unaware of what our mouth tastes like. Getting in touch is an exercise in being a better animal. Continue with *feeling* -- the chair on your butt, the shirt on your shoulders, your hair ruffling in the breeze -- and then isolate and identify every *smell* around you. Fifteen minutes of focus like this will clear your mind in ways you cannot yet imagine.)

For purists, there are "official" meditation exercises, like Transcendental Meditation (the one used by all the Beatles), or yoga (very good option).

For some lucky souls, going to a baseball game is a form of meditation...shutting out the rest of the world, and experiencing a stress-free relaxation. (For most, though, it's just another distraction. You gotta immerse yourself in the game to attain the elevated state of total focus and bliss desired.)

If the whole concept of meditating offends your Western mind, try bio-feedback to reach a contemplative state. Google the term -- you can either do it yourself (not advised), or find some therapist-geek in your area with the actual equipment. (Sports psychologists use bio-feedback a lot.)

4. **Going to a shrink is NOT a sign of weakness.**

Talk therapy is one of the greatest inventions of the modern world. All cultures have institutionalized some form of "safety zone" area to bare your soul, confess, and empty out the shadowy closets of your cloistered mind.

For most stress junkies, however, there is often some past trauma that acts like a Whack-A-Mole hammer on your good feelings. Every time you relax, or feel the tingle of inner peace, *wham!* The past whacks it back down with gleeful vengeance.

Great book to read: "**Learned Optimism**". In it, you'll learn of studies of people who grew up in concentration camps...

... who, later in life, were just as happy and optimistic about life as people who grew up with silver spoons.

Because they **CHOSE** to get over their rotten past, and re-connect with life in a positive way. They beat their internal hammer down, in order to join the Feast.

This contrasts with other people from the same situations, who took that stress-ball of early trauma and ran with it until they dropped, bitter and defeated and physical wrecks. Didn't seem like they were choosing to do so... but they were.

Even more interesting: There are lots and lots of people who grew up without any trauma at all, who have chosen stress as their default reaction to life.

This should be a wake-up call, if you somehow still doubt the power of choice in your own life.

Talk therapy provides a place where you can go deep about anything that troubles you... to a stranger you never have to deal with socially, who will never share your secrets.

The secrets you never tell anyone fester and hold you down. Sharing lets the air out of them, reducing their power to control you. Believe it or not, there are people shuffling around like basket cases because -- decades ago -- they got caught masturbating as kids, or were humiliated in school, or had some hugely unfair streak of bad luck.

The misery they self-inflict has long ago ceased to bear any relation whatsoever to the perceived trauma that obsesses them.

Probably the one revelation I retained from getting a BA in psychology was this: **Repression is a set of handcuffs you put on yourself, and refuse to take off.**

For someone addicted to feeling like a loser, cursed by life, it's *infuriating* to be told you have the power to stop the self-flagellation -- starting right now, if you like -- and instead redirect your life into a path of positive energy and a blissful embrace of everything offered by living life well.

Nevertheless, it's true.

You are *choosing* to hold onto to past injustices and injuries. Helen Keller pissed off lots of people when she refused to allow being deaf, mute and blind (like Tommy) to cramp her lust for life.

Humans have a HUGE appetite for believing our own case of misery is unique, Gothic in scope, and un-fixable. There is a certain amount of perverse pleasure available to martyrs and victims. It's masochistic, but it's also a form of power, in that you can control other people (as long as other people put up with you).

Look -- I was once a stressed-out loser myself... convinced my troubles had been heaped on me by

outside forces beyond my control. I was depressed, inefficient, unsuccessful and having a grand pity-party for myself daily.

You don't have to tell *me* about the bizarre comfort zone of being unhappy.

Only one thing saved my ass: Getting a clear look at my situation, and finally understanding I had choices and options I was *hiding* from.

And I couldn't get to that point of clarity until I relaxed a bit, and put a crimp in the stress spigot.

Looking back, I shudder to know that -- if I hadn't done a self-intervention -- I would either still be limping along a stressed-out path of perceived hopelessness and misery... or dead and gone already. Nailed by my own poisonous chemical dump.

The whole concept of choice freaks most people out.

They either refuse to accept the concept, and remain in denial... or, they fight *through* their own resistance, and get busy rearranging their mind set.

It's never too late to get started, either.

You can tell who has succeeded at doing this. They're the ones digging into the Feast that life offers, with gusto and fearlessness and deep pleasure.

Think about that challenge -- of refusing to stress-out the next time you do something that would normally dump your cortisol payload, without a chaser, into your system.

For some folks, it can be as easy as surviving the next traffic jam without blowing your top -- just go with the flow.

For others, it may involve a long series of mini-decisions -- not to get mad at someone who screwed up, and just fix things without anger... not to freak out when a phone call is late, and either proactively contact the other guy, or just move on to the next appointment and let things work themselves out... not to stew over someone else's attitude or work habits, but just do your own job with honor and integrity and let the chips fall where they may... and on and on.

Small victories lead to major changes.

The main thing is -- if you were in denial about your stress addiction, your cover's been blown.

You now know you have other choices, no matter how infuriating that may be.

Did You Know You Can Get Personal Advice From John Carlton?

You can schedule a one-hour phone consultation with John. They call this one-hour session a "Brain Cleanse", because John go deep into your biz model, sort out and solve problems you identify (and expose problems you may be overlooking), and generally focus our decades of experience on whatever situation you need help with...

... which can include everything related to marketing, writing for your biz, improving your online or offline sales processes, finding more prospects, increasing conversion, smoothing out operations and more.

Note From John: "This is serious business help for people who are serious about fixing problems and getting the best possible insight and advice from a respected, proven professional.

This is NOT cheap. This hour will cost you \$2,500 up front. There is no refund, so be sure I'm the guy you want to consult with before scheduling a session. I've been helping business owners and entrepreneurs and marketers and even other consultants for decades now. I've spent 30 years on the front lines of the biz world, seen it all (from the wildest possible success stories to the most dumb self-destruction of a good biz model) at all levels...

... and if you want that kind of real-world experience put to use for your benefit, then grab this opportunity to talk personally with me. The hour is yours -- you can ask specific questions, or go through specific ads or copy, or just mine my brain for any info, advice or knowledge you need."

Email my personal assistant Diane to set up your consultation (or get your questions about a consultation answered): consult@john-carlton.com

Chapter Five: The Rest Of The Recipe For A Great Life And Career...

Cojones, craft, cocky salesmanship, raw fun and a sodden tip from Keith Richards on how to barge into The Feast and grab your spot...

It's a very pleasant Saturday afternoon here, and I'm sitting outside with my notebook -- dogs curled at my feet in the shade -- considering subjects to write about and reflecting on life.

I do that a lot when I write. Reflect. Bask in the sun. Think the Big Thoughts.

I should be panicked, but I'm not. I'm getting on a plane in two days, headed for the rich forests and gushing rivers of the Oregon interior to attend the freestyle outdoor wedding of my nephew Jeff and his wonderful bride-to-be Jen.

And I've got a ton of work here howling for attention. In a previous incarnation, I would be a frothing basket case twisted in knots by the stress, freaking out over the vast list of details I must complete before the plane leaves the tarmac.

That's one of the main reasons I devoted the last chapter to stress. It's *easy* to freak out -- in fact, it's the default position for most folks.

Much harder to relax and still take care of business. Harder, but nicer.

And definitely a skill worth cultivating.

I know I hit a nerve in that last section, too...

... because when I mailed out the original version of it as a newsletter, I heard from some very important people (including a respected department head at Rodale Press, the largest direct mail company in the world).

Even the most centered and together Zen dharma-heads need to be reminded, every so often, that we *choose* our path (and even our emotions) in life.

It's *your* movie, dude. And you get to write most of the script. That's a concept the sleep-walkers among us would be stunned to discover, and reluctant to accept.

Because that would mean they'd have to, first, take more responsibility for what's happened to them to date ("You mean it's *my* fault I'm in this mess?").

And, second, it's just *too much freakin' pressure* to expect normal people to map out the rest of their

days with specific goals and plans to attain them.

Given the choice of plotting the future... or allowing yourself to be tossed around like flotsam on the ocean... and most folks will actually choose the driftwood option.

It's just too *hard* to accept total responsibility for how things turn out. (Would you like some cheese with that whine?)

You can't move forward, forcefully and with a plan, if you need the approval of friends and family. Most folks abhor ambition and distrust go-getters. They will actively undermine your efforts...

... because they don't want to be left behind, and because your success may even be a slap to their face (and cold water on their "You can't fight city hall" belief system).

You just gotta resign yourself to a few facts. You may have to swap your good old buds for some new ones who won't sabotage your dreams... you may have to go it alone for awhile...

... and you will probably have to be your own cheering section until you establish your basic goals.

People *will* hold your success against you. That's normal. Envy and jealousy are basic emotions. Your true friends will get over it.

That the rest of the planet is snoozing their days away is a HUGE opportunity for you, should you choose the pro-active path. You'll go through competition like a knife through butter, recover quickly from mistakes that cripple other marketers, and enjoy the ride the way it should be enjoyed.

In the immortal words of Lillian Russell: Life is a banquet, and most poor suckers are *starving* to death.

There's a seat at the Feast waiting for you... but you gotta *take* it. No one will give it to you.

The other people already seated are relaxed... successful... and having fun.

If you're surrounded by people who are nervous as squirrels, constantly looking over their financial shoulder, and grumbling about how "bad" their days are... then you ain't living well, friend. You're not yet at the Feast.

Yet, the opportunity for re-embracing the gusto is always there. Relaxed, successful, having fun. It's something to shoot for, and that's why I spent so much time in the last section talking about stress-reduction.

So, for this issue, I've been thinking about the *rest* of the equation for a good life.

And it all came together for me while reading a Rolling Stone magazine interview with Keith Richards.

You know – that lovable drug-gobbling booze-hound rock and roll guitarist. Co-author of “Jumpin’ Jack Flash”, “Brown Sugar”, “(I Can’t Get No) Satisfaction”, “Start Me Up”, “Sympathy For The Devil” and what, maybe a thousand other rock standards.

Guy should be dead twelve times over.

And yet, he's still here. And still kickin', hard.

Relaxed, successful... and if anyone is enjoying their days on earth with more gusto, I'd like to meet them.

Keith, who notoriously had his entire blood supply swapped out like a Quick Lube oil change (to cleanse his system of drug toxins during his worst periods of imbibing), is actually very coherent and lucid these days.

This pisses off the folks who insist that even a single experience with illegal drugs will make your brain explode... but there you have it.

Side Note: I'm not advocating drug use, of course...

... but I've just read some other fascinating articles by economists regarding illicit drug use. Seems that, for most of the population, even addiction follows certain rational rules of choice. There are lots and lots of folks among us who have flirted with "better living through chemistry" for half a lifetime...

... and come out the other side as influential, wise, successful leaders in business, in research, in politics, and in life in general.

Apparently, this whole "choice" thing is much more powerful than many people are willing to admit. Some very smart cookies *choose* to get down with The Dark Side, enjoy the adventure...

... and then return, freshen themselves up, and get after the more "normal" acceptable pursuits -- marriage, business success, a reputation of responsible behavior and "go-to guy" respectability.

Of course, the Assholes who like to run everything *reject* this reality. Their notion of "personal responsibility" ends when someone makes a personal choice that rubs the rule-makers the wrong way.

I'm not sharing this to encourage rebellious behavior. Rebels choose their own paths, anyway -- you don't talk someone into being a non-conformist... they get to that state all on their lonesome.

No. I'm sharing this insight because -- increasingly -- as the world gets more complex, wannabe leaders get more vehement about how "simple" and black-and-white it all really is. Evidence to the contrary be damned.

And a big part of what I teach is all about getting comfy with *reality* -- and bad *belief systems* be damned. Whatever reality turns out to be.

Let the rest of the world stumble along half-asleep, deep in denial and lulled by high-tech drugs like television and video games and celebrity worship. You're not responsible for their choices.

But you *are* responsible for your own choices. And, if I've learned anything worthwhile over the course of living hard for half a century, it's that *facing reality* is where all the rewards are. A better life, a more vibrant brain, a tastier level of success and satisfaction.

So, when a ne'er-do-well scoundrel like Keith Richards shares an insight, I don't look at it through the lens of recrimination and disgust. Instead, I look for how it rings with *reality*.

Turns out, the dude is pretty darn wicked smart, still.

End of Side Note.

Anyway... what Keith mentioned in this article was this (and I quote): "*So we asked them* [the Vibrations, a black R&B band the Rolling Stones worked with early in their career, who were smooth and together even when the gig involved 3 shows a day, while the Stones were dragging around as exhausted, clueless teens] *'How the hell do you do it, man?'*

And the answer was, 'You take one of these, and you smoke a little bit of this.' And you got the recipe, you know?"

Again, don't get in a huff. I'm not advocating drug use.

However, as a musician, it was fascinating to hear a truly successful artist explain what "clicked" into place when he was just getting his act together. This wasn't about being a drugged-out basket case and screwing up your performance onstage. (That came later in his career.)

No. *This was about achieving a state where he could do what he needed to do... to be successful.* They hadn't yet been noticed by the record companies. They could have easily failed, and gone into the dust bin of history without a trace.

But they didn't.

Instead... they discovered "**the recipe**".

And THAT comment set my marketing mind on fire.

Because, really, success in anything you do comes down to **finding the right recipe**. The right mix of ingredients, skills, motivations, and whatever else you require to do what you need to do.

THIS is what everyone is looking for when they come to gurus and teachers, when they seek out seminars and courses and books and knowledge -- a *recipe* they can follow. (And, just to make clear this is an analogy and not advocacy, I'm pretty sure that illicit drugs are *not* part of a successful business plan, in most cases.)

It's also why so MANY wannabe teachers and not-quite-there wannabe "experts" completely and utterly miss the boat.

They follow a familiar pattern: They experience success at some level... and immediately announce that they understand everything ABOUT success, and can share it with you.

Most of the time, it's bullshit.

They don't actually have a *recipe* for success, something you can also follow.

No. They're more like a guy who metaphorically steps up to bat against Roger Clemens, wildly flails at a fastball with eyes closed... and somehow makes contact and gets a hit.

Whoopee. Suddenly, they're an expert.

But relying on a lucky break like that makes you *dangerous* as a "teacher".

Cuz there's no *substance* backing up your claim of expertise.

Online, a vast snarling mob of people have experienced impressive -- and lucrative -- success through one-time tricks, or by blundering into a technological opportunity before anyone else found it.

Or, they entered virgin markets and collected low-hanging fruit before the rest of the gang got hip.

And good for them.

However, a trick, or stumbling into opportunity, or blindly doing something once, isn't a recipe that others can benefit from. (Often, by the time these wannabe experts get their "How I Did It & How You Can, Too" material out, the window of opportunity they took advantage of is closed, anyway.)

So... relaxing here in the afternoon sun... I'm thinking about the recipe for copywriting success that I've been using, and teaching.

Not the theory.

The actual *ingredients*. A recipe you can use.

And here's what I came up:

First, make sure you're *really* hungry. This is a very filling recipe, but the only way to fully enjoy it is to roll up your sleeves and devour this dish whole.

And repeat, as necessary, every friggin' day for the rest of your life.

So... into the mixing bowl of your life...

Carlton's Super-Tasty "Copywriting Success" Recipe (serves one)

Start with a huge helping of salesmanship. Use the highest quality salesmanship you can find -- classic, aged, and proven to be the best available. Don't be fooled by cheap-shit imitations. The good stuff is a little corny... a little benignly manipulative (make sure that all the tease, all the take-away, and all the urgent calls to action are intact)... and heavy on persuasion and proof.

Mix in an equal amount of craft. Use only brand-name skills here, provided by time-tested veterans with long damn track records of success and experience up the yin-yang. Don't try to shortcut this step by skimming through a wannabe writer's bullshit "quickie copy creator" guide (or, worse, software). Stick to the proven good stuff. You can freeload off other people's genius while you get through your rookie stage, but don't get addicted to ripping, or you'll eventually find yourself being the Emperor with no clothes. Master the skills.

Add a healthy dash of cojones. Okay, make it a couple of dashes. Moving forward often means taking risks. You can't sell from your heels (as most marketers try to do). And you can't make the necessary bold promises required in a killer pitch if you don't have the chops to back it up. Learning salesmanship and mastering your craft will give you the right to be a little cocky when necessary. Faint heart ne'er won fair maid (to quote Bill Shakespeare).

Top off with a layer of fun. Not grim amusement, and not resigned ironic chuckles. I've now got enough dead friends to realize something important: They would trade being gone for even a single one of your "bad" days alive, in an instant. Life is precious. For all the war and all the misery around us, we're still living in the best times in history. The freedom, the access to liberating knowledge, the enlightened consciousness available, and the luxuries of modern Western life may piss off the terrorists... but it sure makes for an excellent ride, if you would only wake up and embrace it.

That's the recipe. Each ingredient is critical.

Take fun, for example. ALL the top marketers I know are having a blast. It's essential for a good life. Smell the roses, watch your kids sleep peacefully, just let the abundance of good things flow over you in awe and wonder.

Sure, there are bumps and obstacles, periods of grief and disorientation... *tell* me about it... but you still have the choice to roll with the punches and *re-engage* life on your terms after the dust settles, with the throttle open and the top down.

This will *all* pass soon enough, Bucko. Your days are numbered.

And yet, you have almost total control over how you choose to *spend* them.

My recipe is basic, and of course each ingredient has complex roots.

You increase your odds of failing miserably if ANY of the four ingredients are faulty, or of evil-bad quality, or if you chintz out and try to cheat.

You can *overdo* it, too.

It's a balancing act, but it's not hard to pull off... if you're awake.

In fact, the two biggest *basic* problems I see, from my vantage point of doing critiques and consulting with copywriters and marketers, are these:

Basic Problem #1. You're not *cocky* enough, and you're trying to sell from your heels. That means you're poised to run away at the slightest hint your prospect may not instantly fall head-over-heels-in-love with what you have, or (worse) may be offended by your efforts to actually close the sale.

Basic Problem #2. You're *too* cocky. This is a huge problem when your copy is full of attitude, and you don't (or can't) *back it up with proof*.

Way too many marketers confuse *bragging* with making a bold statement. If you don't offer proof, you're just a blowhard, and you'll be ignored.

Both problems are solved by using the best salesmanship and honing your skills before you even begin to write your pitch.

Salesmanship is all about "reading" your prospect, walking a mile in his shoes, understanding his needs and fears and the nightmares that keep him awake at night, and knowing how to quickly bond with him...

... and how to *persuade* him to first consider, and then buy, what you offer.

Craft is all about putting that salesmanship into written copy, or into spoken words via video or a lecture, or into whatever delivery vehicle you choose.

Craft is the *translation* of killer salesmanship into a form you can use to confront your prospect.

None of this is rocket science.

But *is* hidden from most of the population.

And you gotta beware of imitations. World-class copy is like gourmet cooking. You cheat on ingredients, and your dish sucks.

You now have an advantage I never had, starting out. I had *no idea* the recipe could be so simple and straightforward.

I focused on the craft first -- the skills of actually writing. I had to skimp on the salesmanship, because there weren't many resources that offered an education in salesmanship.

I devoured the books on the subject -- the quality stuff by Claude Hopkins, David Ogilvy, John Caples -- and spent a long time dissecting controls by proven copywriters, rooting around for what made the pitch work.

But it didn't come together for me until I mentored under REAL salesmen, like Gary Halbert and Jay Abraham.

That's when I finally experienced the "*A-ha!*" eureka moment that took me over the top.

And those advanced details of salesmanship are what I'm now sharing with you, in this book and on the blog and in my seminars and speeches.

I realize this recipe metaphor is too cute by half, and maybe you're thinking it's just a clever turn of phrase.

It isn't.

I'm telling you, from the other side of success and living well, the concept of a recipe is perhaps the most *important* insight I've ever shared with you.

In fact, it might be a good thing to engage in some "Karate Kid" style exercises. If you've never tried to bake bread, take an evening and give it a go. You'll discover the importance of getting the ingredients -- and the amounts of each -- just right.

Too much of anything, or too little, and you fail.

It's a balancing act. You get better as you go.

And you get REALLY freakin' good at that magical point where you finally "get it" and it all clicks into place.

Copywriting, marketing, and life are just like that. There are recipes for doing it all very well... and once you discover them, and stay true to them, you get closer and closer to that amazing seat at the Feast.

Okay, now I'm hungry.

Go bake some bread. Play an old Stones CD for atmosphere, just for the heck of it...

How To Join John's Exclusive Mastermind Group.

John and his longtime biz partner Stan Dahl host an exclusive ongoing mastermind group called "The Platinum Mastermind Group". The group meets 4 times a year, and maintains an online members-only email group so members can interact, help each other in-between meetings, and take full advantage of the mastermind concept (brainstorming, networking, getting critiques, floating ideas, using each other's Rolodex's, etc.).

This group is the flagship group in John's world. He keeps it small, so everyone gets detailed, intense attention during each meeting. It's not your usual mastermind, either – rather, every member gets a Hot Seat total-focus hour centered on your chosen subject or subjects (which can be anything you feel you need to get group input or advice on... from reviewing new marketing programs, to creating new products, to entering new markets or starting a new biz entirely... and even how to better combine work and private life successfully).

This is a brilliant way to get confidential access to some of the savviest business minds around, plus have a group of entrepreneurs who share your worldview be there to watch your back, help fix problems, and enlarge your network dramatically.

To get more information, email John's personal assistant Diane at consult@john-carlton.com

Chapter Six:

No Good Deed Goes Unpunished...

*Earning your “punk entrepreneur” stripes, persuasion secrets for the criminally-shy, and how deadlines became man’s greatest invention.
And watch out for the suicide rabbits.*

I had a little epiphany the other evening about you. You may or may not like it.

Here it is: **You’re a punk.**

As in “punk rocker”. We all are -- you, me, Gary Halbert, Joe Polish, Jay Abraham...

... heck, I could name almost everyone I know in business. And every entrepreneur you know or have heard about.

Punk.

This is a compliment. And, yes, I probably need to explain myself here:

Last Saturday night the Red Dog Saloon closed down.

You wouldn’t have heard about it on CNN, but around these parts, it was a sad, sad event.

The Red Dog is in Virginia City, just outside of Reno. Virginia City was built during the mid-1800’s silver strike that funded San Francisco, and C Street hasn’t changed much in those 150-odd years. Wooden sidewalks, ancient windows with sagging glass, all those squared-off store fronts just like you see in old westerns.

And wandering those warped sidewalks (after the tourists go home at dusk) is the weirdest bunch of honest characters you’ll ever see outside of a David Lynch flick.

Virginia City is populated with serious artists, dangerous iconclasts, fifth-generation “never left home” misfits, part “nowhere else to go” oddballs.

I love the place.

Anyway, the Red Dog Saloon is infamous for being the joint where the “San Francisco Sound” started in the 1960’s. You young-uns will draw a blank, but bands like the Charlatans, Quicksilver Messenger Service, Jefferson Airplane and even Janis Joplin owe their fame (such as it is) to this cramped little bar perched a mile up just east of Lake Tahoe.

The Red Dog. (It’s what Jerry Garcia was referring to when he sang “I lit out from Reno, I was

chased by 20 hounds...”)

All right, I'm showing my age. I still have a pretty good point to make here, so stay with me.

The Red Dog was only alive for a few years in the sixties, and then got closed down and turned into a tee shirt shop.

Until some brave, die-hard hippies named Richard and Mary leased it, rolled up their tie-dyed sleeves and re-created the saloon again about seven years ago.

They put in a honking big real-saloon type bar, a nice little stage, a *great* juke box, and plastered the walls with about a thousand dog-eared photos of rock stars, along with vintage posters and other memorabilia.

You walked in, it could have been 1969.

Word spread quickly. Old and current rock royalty showed up (including Huey Lewis, whose sound man Ralph became a staple at the bar, making sure the bands sounded good). I threw together a combo called the “Dirty Rat Bastids”, and was honored to be the third band to hit the new Red Dog stage.

Some of the best musicians I've ever played with took that stage regularly.

But it couldn't last.

It was a classic period -- and the landlords of the property decided they liked the regular income of a tourist shop better than the soul-pleasing turbulence of a rockin' saloon... and they shut the party down.

Saturday night was the last one. I showed up early to jam for long hours with various musicians and singers.

People cried, drank, danced, cried some more, and were still dancing when I left around midnight. The end of another era. Chokes me up.

And yet, I thoroughly enjoyed myself. There's something mystical about music when it's played from the heart.

As sad as we all were, it was one hell of a raucous wake, and we tore it up. I feel a little more alive for the experience. Music does that.

Now, the drive back to Reno takes about 45 minutes. It's all switchbacks and black ice and wild mustangs and deer standing on the shoulder giving you the evil eye. (You must also be constantly vigilant for suicide rabbits that inexplicably bolt from the brush to immolate themselves under your tires.)

And during that long drive home, I got to thinking about you. Us. Entrepreneurs, and all the wacky people working the frosty edges of the business world.

Here is what I realized: Rock and roll made an impression on the world's psyche because it arrived with *passion and nerve*.

The establishment has constantly tried to kill it (congressional hearings in 1955, 1960, and the recent Tipper Gore nonsense... not to mention all the record burnings and bans and police gassings of concerts). But it keeps crawling back out of the grave to get your butt shaking again.

Disco almost killed rock for good in the 1970s. The details aren't important, but by 1976 popular music was a pathetic mess. It was all fancy clothes, and shiny lyrics, and empty beats.

I gotta tell you -- it was *no fun* as a musician listening to the radio during those fallow years.

Then suddenly, bursting like heroes through all this musical goo... came bands like the Sex Pistols and the Ramones (and on their heels, the Pretenders, Elvis Costello, the Dead Kennedys, Talking Heads, the Clash and hundreds more).

It was like a wake-up call for rock's soul. Punk rock. It had roots in rockabilly, not ABBA.

And it was *not* safe -- it was dirty, raw, dangerous... *and so full of passion and piss and vinegar it pinned your ears back*.

Punk saved rock. It is *still* saving the music, to this day. (See: Green Day, Nirvana, et al.)

How? By channeling *passion*. By remembering what was so important and urgent about life and music in the first place.

By waking up and grabbing the world by the balls.

And this was my epiphany: *You* are a punk rocker, too, in your own way.

Doesn't matter if you like the music or not. (Sinatra had the attitude, too.) *You embody the power of punk with your passion for honest, edgy advertising.*

You'll be misunderstood, mocked and held in contempt by others... just like the punks... but you can remain smug in the knowledge that you're carrying the torch for the truth.

The rest of the world slumbers and sleep-walks through their day. Ad agencies and businesses and marketers put up pretty campaigns that are empty and dumb. There is no passion. Nothing urgent about it. Most of the business world's marketing is boring drudgery. And pointless and bad and ineffective and wasteful.

This is what gives capitalism a bad name.

And, without cocky little bastards like us, the TRUE art of great advertising might be lost forever.

Look at the world-class ads written by Halbert, Abraham, Bencivenga, and yours truly. They grab you by the lapels and shake you up. They drip with enthusiasm, honest feeling and verve and urgency. They *demand* you pay attention. They *force* you to become involved.

And, sure, I see the irony here. Punk rock glorified in giving the establishment the finger, and eschewing consumerism and conformity.

So what? Without quite realizing it, they were still participating in capitalism, taking the freedoms of western democracy at its word. They rebelled against mindless culture. They rebelled against the anti-life horrors of the couch potato existence.

You wouldn't be enjoying this book if you were asleep and unconscious about life and advertising. I think a huge part of what drew you into my web was the passion, the aliveness, and the brass balls of the kind of writing I endorse.

And I see it every time I critique ads written by folks who study my stuff. Most start out meek and hesitant... but quickly become *snarling beasts*, once they realize that -- yes -- you CAN tap into and harness that deep well of honest passion inside you.

Your job is to stir it up. Wake up your prospects, and make 'em squirm a little. Take them out of their safe little comfort zones, and show them how fabulous and different and grand life can be...

... *if only they will come along with you.*

Make 'em dance. Force them to open their eyes and see things they only vaguely dreamed of before.

I salute you for being part of this punk marketing movement. We're saving business. So embrace your inner rebellious, in-your-face punk. It's a *compliment*, dude.

Rock on.

Tales From The Vice Squad

Just don't expect anyone to *thank* you for your efforts.

There's a curious saying among street-wise businessmen: "No good deed goes unpunished."

And what it means is just that: If you go through life believing anyone is going to honestly congratulate you on your successes, or honor a favor you did for them...

... you are sadly mistaken.

This is a law of human nature that all great salesmen understand.

And it's a lesson I've had to re-learn over and over again. Because it just seems to defy common sense and "the way things ought to be".

Well, it's a thousand times better to understand how things *are*. Take off the rose-colored glasses, and get in touch with the way humans *actually behave toward each other*. It will help you hone your bonding skills, and boost you into the upper levels of great salesmanship.

Don't hold a grudge against anyone who punishes you for doing a good deed.

Just chalk it up to your life-long education, and keep moving.

What this law teaches us is that -- in every instance, on every occasion, in every situation -- you are dealing with a human being with an ego at least as big and nervous as your own.

And that ego will warp incoming information to fit it's own version of reality.

You know which reality I'm talking about, too. It's the one where you are always the good guy, the wronged party, the innocent victim of misunderstanding. God forbid an evil intent should ever surface inside your heart of gold.

And you do not like to owe favors to anyone. None of us do. Given the chance, our spoiled little egos will rearrange facts and memories in order to turn any favor done for us... into something we *deserved* in the first place.

And the person bestowing the favor becomes a sucker to be pitied.

The con artist knows this, and uses it. If you are ever approached in the street by a stranger who says he wants to do you a favor, you are about to be fleeced.

Here's how I've seen it manifest in business: On occasion, I have in the past cut a deal with a client on my fee. And it has always -- *always* -- come back to bite me in the ass.

Doing someone a "favor" by discounting your fee may seem, to your mind, like a nice thing to do. But that isn't how it is received deep in the mind of your client.

Nope. Unconsciously, he has already *devalued your services*. You've blinked, in a sense, and given him the upper hand. You've shown weakness, and relieved him of the main purpose of your fee -- which is to establish your authority so you can make him do what he needs to do.

When I charge a client my breathtakingly high fees, he seldom quarrels with what I produce for him.

After all, he paid me an expert's sum, and so expects an expert's effort. Things progress as they

should, and the client does what he is supposed to do. The world is as it should be.

Not so when a “favor” is introduced.

Suddenly, my writing is seen as suspect. The client’s spouse, English Lit major daughter, his accountant, even his golfing buddies are all suddenly entitled to a say in the ad.

After all, he got me for cheap, and so expects a cheap effort.

I know business owners who insist on paying their employees well. In fact, after agreeing to a salary, they will often add another five bills or so a month to the amount.

At first, this pleases the new employee greatly. But the pleasure soon wears off, and the employee quickly feels *entitled* to the better salary. His ego has justified it in his mind -- he is *worth* more.

And you know what happens next?

I’ve seen it many times -- the employee, who just a short time ago was overjoyed and so grateful for the “favor” of an elevated salary, now expects even more goodies for his hard labors. More money. Maybe a company car. A new title.

His ego *demands* it.

You loan your desperate neighbor your lawnmower the first time, and he’s grateful. Soon, however, he will stop asking you for it, and will just help himself. You may never see the thing again. And in his mind, it’s all right. He’s not doing anything wrong. It all makes sense to *his* ego.

In your marketing, you can have “bargain sales” occasionally. I insist on it with most clients.

However, you must always explain in your ads *why* this is a one-time event, and give a damn good reason why it’s happening at all. Fire sale, inventory problem, model change, whatever.

But you must be careful not to train your customers to *expect* bargains. You have to keep your normal prices high in order to make the bargain stand out.

And stop cutting unnecessary deals with your customers. You give your stuff away for free, or for cheap, to someone (no matter how good their sob story is), and it affects you on levels you can’t even measure yet.

In places like Las Vegas, there are women who are “accidental” hookers. In their minds, they are not doing anything wrong -- they just sort of *accidentally* wind up with money from men they sleep with.

Yet no matter how much it makes sense to their egos... the truth is, they’re cheap prostitutes.

Same with you. No matter how much it seems to make sense for you to cut your rates, just this once...

the truth is, you're devaluing your services. To the client, to the customer, to yourself and the universe.

Look -- the *real* favor you do for people is to provide the service you provide, or the product you create.

The price you charge is the price of the ticket to your world, where you are in charge, and where you make the magic happen. You do no one a favor by cheapening its value.

You want it, you take it... and you pay the price.

Salesmanship 101

You know what world-class salesmen do that *you* don't?

They practice the art of persuasion every day. With everyone they come in contact with, both at the job and in their private lives.

They know that, to become a master of persuasion, you must become *obsessed* with it.

No matter how good your product or service is, your prospect doesn't really want it. He doesn't want to be sold, doesn't want to feel any urgency with finding out more, and certainly doesn't want to pull out his wallet.

You must *persuade* him.

I tell clients to think of their prospect as a huge blob so overcome with inertia it will not move quickly to save its own life. That's what you have to imagine you're up against.

And your job is to light a fire under this blob's butt, and get it to move and think and feel. And desire.

Even more daunting, you must motivate this blob to pull out its wallet, pick up a phone, and call a stranger... to order something that, fifteen minutes ago, it didn't even know existed.

Listen carefully: People are *not* sitting around desperately hoping for a marketer like you to come into their lives and sell them something.

Mostly, they resent your presence. They resent you having something they want. And they resent, most of all, you giving them an itch that can only be scratched by buying what you have.

The biggest "missing link" I see in all the ads I critique... *is the art of persuasion.*

Most ads mumble and equivocate. Most letters are almost apologetic about asking for action. The closest many writers get to a sales pitch is to say, in effect, "here I am; how much do you want?" No persuasion at all. No attempt to capture the heart and mind of their prospect.

The more I'm in this "guru" biz, the more I see how *elusive* the essence of great salesmanship is.

I didn't realize it at the time, but during my long learning period, the juiciest stuff I was extracting from the mentors I encountered was all about persuasion.

Now, I practice persuasion constantly.

I get criminally-shy non-singers to climb on stage at karaoke bars and belt out Broadway tunes. I put bugs in people's ears about movies, or books, or restaurants... and induce them to actually follow up. I find conversational areas people are loathe to go... and then take them there.

I wear my salesman's hat every day, in every situation.

It's a tough thing to do, persuade. People will stubbornly NOT do what is in their own best interest. (I know a medical doctor who suffers from migraines no pill can help... and who refuses to even *consider* chiropractic "out of principle". She trusts me, respects me... and yet cannot believe my own story of ending lifelong migraines with a single visit to a chiro. Yet she is willing to go under a surgeon's knife in a desperate attempt to get relief. Stubborn.)

People do not like being taken out of their comfort zones... even when faced with undeniable evidence.

This stumps rookie salesmen. They have something of quality, something that will actually help the prospect, and is a genuine value... and they get frustrated when a simple presentation of the facts *isn't enough* to induce action.

So they lecture. Argue. Cajole. Even scold the prospect.

All wrong. Great salesmen know that you can't push anyone toward a sale.

You have to convince them they're making the decision to buy *all on their own*. Saying "you need this" will only strengthen resistance. Saying "*you can't have this*" (a classic take-away tactic) triggers desire.

There are tricks to persuasion -- clever techniques and shrewd psychology you can use to talk like a salesman. I explain many of them in "Kick-Ass Copywriting Secrets". And it will pay off *quickly*, learning these things.

But just as important... is practicing the "attitude" of persuasion throughout your day.

If you can't persuade your buddy to go eat at a new deli around the corner, you're going to have trouble convincing a stranger with your copy to buy anything from you.

Practicing persuasion is fun, if you have the right attitude. You are, essentially, a social scientist

collecting data and testing methods.

You're also a *spy*, working undercover to develop the amazing skills that will make you powerful.

Don't keep score as you practice -- just pay attention to your prospect, and observe how your tactics work and don't work.

You'll find out quickly that you cannot bully anyone into making a decision. You'll find that throwing a tantrum is pointless. And you'll discover that lecturing can empty a room of even eager potential customers.

It's like putting money in the bank. You'll reinforce all the proven tactics in your own mind. How necessary it is to bond first... to establish credibility without bragging... to tease effectively and good-naturedly build desire without appearing to do so... and how *potent* third-party testimonials can be ("Okay, so don't believe me -- ask Joe.")

Start today. Get someone to go see a movie they wouldn't otherwise consider. (This phenomenon has recently swept the country with "My Big Fat Greek Wedding" -- an indie flick that garnered huge box office solely on word of mouth. Honest passion from people who desperately wanted to convince their friends to share the fun did the trick.)

Sell your significant other on doing something they have heretofore refused to do. Generate some real unexpected excitement in someone's life.

And notice how much romance, feeling, empathy and concentration is required to successfully persuade. Like I said -- it ain't easy. But it is the essence of world-class advertising.

How-To Department

Often, I suggest that folks "get in touch with your inner lazy ass".

I was really aiming that statement at workaholics and control freaks, in an effort to get them to lighten up. You *can* work too hard. It *will* kill you.

But you can be *too lazy*, too. In fact, it's in our nature to be lazy. I delight in telling people that, if you really want to understand how the human race behaves, you must go watch the gorilla cage at the zoo for a week. At first, you'll just see a bunch of hairy apes doing their thing.

But soon enough, you'll begin to recognize the many traits they share with us.

Such as... being as *lazy* as possible, as much as possible.

I was a no-account lazy bum for much of my youth. I enjoyed it, to tell the truth.

But it got me nowhere. When I finally entered the business world, I picked up on the one tactic that

actually forced employees to get anything done:

Deadlines.

Oh, they can be hateful things, deadlines. Reminiscent of high school papers due, smog tests needed, so-and-so's birthday coming up (when they expect something impressive from you).

And, when you finally go out on your own, it can be tempting to abandon them. Big mistake.

As inherently-lazy creatures, we *need* deadlines to be efficient.

Nowadays, I'm a deadline-setting monster. But I've lost the resentment I used to harbor... because deadlines have made me so much money over the years.

Do you know why most novels never get written?

Because there's no deadline.

Writers think about the plot for years on end, whittling their thumbs. Come up with brilliant twists while showering. Make vague plans about renting a cabin in the mountains someday and finally finishing the damn thing.

And it never happens. Because there's no *deadline*.

Deadlines make your goals become reality. They form a brick wall in the misty netherworld of "tomorrow" that keeps you in line.

Deadlines should be an integral part of your business plan. In most corporations where I've had an inside peek, deadlines are forever allowed to be pushed back. (Thus, they aren't real deadlines.) Committees are formed to "study" the problem, endless focus groups are created to "test" the problem, reams of reports are written and shelved in an effort to "get at the problem".

All bullshit. The **ONLY** way to attack a problem... is to roll up your sleeves and dig in. *And have a plan that includes a friggin' deadline for finishing it.*

This is not a small or minor hindrance in your quest for wealth. I recently fielded yet another email from a rookie who claimed to desperately want to become "the best copywriter in the world."

Okay. Fine.

But his question reeked of fear -- he wanted to know how much time each day he should spend reading books about copywriting and advertising, and how often he should copy out great ads in longhand.

Not okay. Not fine.

This boy is crippled with “can’t let the curtain come up” disease. A pretty bad case, too. Unfortunately... he’s got a lot of company.

This kind of question never even forms in the mind of someone *truly* seeking copywriting expertise. You’re too busy making your goal a reality.

It’s not “how long should I prepare”, but “what *else* can I do, right now, to make this *happen*?” Action, not excuses for inaction.

You want to get into it up your neck, as quickly as possible.

Get the material ready for your first ad (whether it’s for your own business or for your first client), do the detective work, write a dozen versions (each one stronger and more focused than the previous), and push for a test mailing or insertion into a publication or posting on the web or whatever.

If you’re placing an ad, you’ll have a ready-made deadline: The last day for submissions of camera-ready art. If you miss it, you still get charged.

Real life is very *unlike* high school, where you can miss a deadline if you have a “good enough” excuse. In the Big Boy’s world, there are no excuses. Not sleet, nor rain, nor dead of night, nor having your dog eat every paper in your office will get you off the hook.

Scary, yes.

But without deadlines, civilization would grind to a halt. Trains would stop running, no one would show up to work, food would not get delivered to stores. You’d be sitting in a cold, dark house without running water.

Yet, if you work for yourself, it can be tempting to cut yourself slack on your own deadlines. Big mistake. That web site will take forever to get up and running. That phone call to the new prospect will never get made. That book won’t get written, the video won’t get shot, the ad will never be placed.

I am *brutal* about my own deadlines. I’ve never missed a deadline for a client -- *never* -- and I’ll be damned if I’ll treat myself with any less respect.

Even so... and even though I know the power of deadlines... I still waffle and hesitate to make them part of my plan for any project.

Because they can be painful. You have to forgo pleasures and fun things, sometimes, to meet your deadlines. You have to stay up late, and concentrate and focus and absorb and retain stuff. And it hurts. *Mommy!* I don’t *feeeeel* well. I need to stay *home* today.

Nope. Sick or stressed, crashed computer or stalled car, you gotta meet your deadlines.

It's good for you. Healthy, even. (It's true -- nearly all the really successful business owners I know... the ones having fun making their fortunes... rarely get sick.)

It's also another of those little secret traits that set you apart from your competitors, no matter what business you're in. Setting and meeting deadlines is a major form of *taking responsibility for yourself*. You become the "action center-point" of any deal, because you're the guy making everything happen.

And you'll come to love your deadlines, I promise you.

Because, once you stop stalling around and making excuses and start setting deadlines... ***an amazing amount of things will start happening in your life.*** And you'll be the guy making them happen.

Projects will get done, and profits will start rolling in.

It happens fast, and it changes your life almost immediately. So stop whining. Embrace your next deadline. It's your partner.

Ship of Fools Department

This one is easy. I want to tell you about the dangers of violating the "emotional contracts" you have with everyone in your life (including customers you've never met).

Here is what I mean: In many ways, your private romantic life is exactly like your business life. Sometimes it's easier to understand the ramifications of your actions when you think about them in personal terms.

Every relationship has a "contract" that defines acceptable and unacceptable behavior. It may be unconscious and unspoken (such as expecting your steady date to stop also dating the entire basketball team)...

... or it may be written out in legal terms and carved in stone (such as a prenuptial agreement).

And, if that contract is violated, *you have a hard choice*. Most adults have had their hearts broken once or twice. Most have also forgiven a trespasser and tried to patch things up. I'm not saying this is right or wrong.

But it defines who you are. And yes, I do believe, at times, you can put the egg back in the shell and duct tape it back into a semblance of its former pure self.

But you are then the guy with the duct-taped egg. And that entails a whole new set of baggage you must now haul around for the rest of your days.

I'm being careful here. I am not suggesting you get medieval on every person who hurts your feelings

in a relationship.

However, I *am* suggesting that you get a clear-eyed view of what you're doing.

If someone has violated an emotional contract with you to the point of intense pain -- and the worst pain I've ever felt was having my heart broken (which metaphorically brought me to my knees for several years) -- you should understand what forgiving them entails.

You do *not* heal quickly, no matter how much of a stud you are emotionally. And, in most cases... and here's the rub... it will take you the *same amount of time* to forgive and put your ruined relationship back together... as it will to bail, and start over with *someone else*.

Dangerous thoughts, I know. And, yes, I believe that people can change. Sometimes. When it suits them.

But they seldom *do* change. If this sounds shocking to you... and offends your sense of the way the world "ought to be", then I'm sorry. Part of the steep price of becoming awake and living a real life, is to come to terms with the way things are.

And people seldom change. No matter how much they apologize and swear they've learned their lesson.

There are a lot of other fish in the sea. And this realization will put some *steel* into both your private life... and your business life.

Because clients and customers are like lovers. When they respect you and the emotional contract between you, life is great. And when they violate it, you have hard choices to make.

Just be aware that the effort to repair broken trust, and the time it takes to heal, is enormous.

And it may be better to turn that effort, and use that time, to *go find something better*.

Coaches Corner

Hey, you like cash?

I do. In a former life, I was probably that guy who buried wads of it in tin cans in the back yard, or stuffed the mattress.

Cash is so *physical*. You got a buck, it's a buck. Not some blip in a bank's computer somewhere.

I know several guys who were briefly "millionaires" back in 2000... until their blips on the NASDAQ computers sputtered and disappeared. I'm also old enough to remember something called "Savings and Loans" institutions... all of which crumbled and disappeared back during Reagan's watch. The fed had a *penny* saved up in insurance for every \$10 of deposited cash. And, despite a

multi-billion dollar bailout, a lot of people saw their life savings vanish.

I also remember what all that “corporate raiding” was about in the ‘80s -- taking over fat companies to plunder their pension plans.

This is not ancient history. If you tried to make a withdrawal in the week after the 9-11 terrorist attacks, you may have discovered that your bank limited you to \$500.

Sure, it’s supposed to be *your* money... but it’s blips on *their* computer. They hold the purse strings.

You’ve heard the mantra before: *Diversify* your money, so you aren’t cornered like a rat in any emergency. I’m not gonna get specific here, because that’s not my job. I’m just alerting you to what you need to pay attention to.

And remind you that no one -- *no one* -- will take as good care of your money as you will.

True diversity mixes up tangible assets, like real estate, gold coins, *access to a month’s nut in twenties and hundreds*, and machinery (enviable wealth in a cold snap with the power out can be an oil lantern and a wind-up radio)... with intangibles like overseas bank accounts, smart investments and -- most importantly -- talent, knowledge and connections.

There may come a time when it is better to know someone with a backwoods cabin and a well than it is to know the mayor.

Get More Carlton At The Blog...

If you're enjoying this book, and still have a jones for more...

... make sure you pop over to John's infamous blog at <http://www.john-carlton.com>, and sign in for email alerts on new posts. (There's a library's worth of archives on the site, too.)

The sign-in box is top right. Make sure you do this first, because you don't wanna miss what's coming up...

Chapter Seven:

Wounded Gazelles In Hyena-Town...

Ad-created fevers, swearing into the phone, “screw the customer” business models and phantom markets. And why “keep it simple, stupid” is still the best advice out there.

So this is what my life has come to in middle age: It’s New Year’s Day, and I am (a) not hung-over...

... (b) not wondering where the hell I am...

...and (c) not praying that I didn’t do anything illegal or extra humiliating last night.

This is probably a good thing, overall.

There was a point, around twenty years ago, where I had reached what I thought was the ideal lifestyle of a true “writer” -- hard drinking, chain smoking, living in a garret and hanging out with like-minded lunatics until dawn as often as possible.

Problem was, while we looked and acted like writers, we seldom got any writing *done*. It was all show and no substance.

Much easier to talk about the book you’re gonna write than actually write it... and *much* more fun to get plastered and talk about it with equally-sloshed friends than to shut yourself up in a room and stare down a blank sheet of paper.

You know, the way *real* writers do.

I was reminded of all this as I slogged through the latest requests for critiques from subscribers.

The quality of the stuff that gets sent to me for critique is all over the map. Much of it is very, very dysfunctional, but it’s a start. Some of the manuscripts show definite promise, given some dedicated rewriting.

But I live for the occasional pieces that jump out and *grab me by the throat* -- especially the stuff from folks who struggled hard with their copy, rewriting and rewriting until the pitch finally lurched out of mediocrity and went screaming into the realm of world-class marketing.

One longtime subscriber took my advice, loosened up, stalked the computer, got in a froth...

... and finally knocked out a headline and opening paragraph that reads like a haymaker to your brain.

Another penned the first piece I've critiqued this year that was near-to-perfect. Edgy copy that demands to be read. *Demands* it.

And yet another rookie freelancer warmed the cockles of my heart by sharing his finest victory as a copywriter: A prospect ordered in the middle of the night, admitting to not being able to sleep after reading his sales letter. She was afraid she would miss out...

... and wouldn't be able to *live* with herself if that happened.

Dragged herself out of bed, found the phone, dialed by nightlight. In a fever.

Hey -- as I told that writer after he'd emailed to thank me: It's *fun* when this stuff works, isn't it.

None of these guys are "natural" writers. This is not a matter of some innate "gift" rising to the top with a little mild coaxing. No way.

What they did was simple and yet heroic. They faced down the blank page, struggled with early failure, *and kept rewriting until they got it right.*

I saw many of the early drafts, and they sucked. My critiques are always brutal and without mercy -- exactly the way I critique my *own* writing. Because copywriting is serious business, with money on the line. There's no room for namby-pamby Kumbaya glad-handing when you're writing for keeps.

I never learned a damn thing as a rookie when more experienced writers pretended that my early attempts at sales pitches were "a good effort".

Wait, I take that back -- I learned that "a good effort" *doesn't cut it* in the mean streets of advertising. Many a rookie writer has proudly sent his "good effort" out into the world only to have his heart broken when the precious little thing was ignored by the market.

Undiagnosed problems in your pitch will *murder* your bottom line. No one does you any favors by lying to avoid hurting your feelings.

What you want is a killer, world-class pitch. And yes, you may have to struggle a bit to whip your copy into shape. You may have to rewrite it many more times than you find convenient. You may have to *trash* entire manuscripts, and start over from scratch more than once.

If this merciless sort of behavior bothers you, then stick to writing in your diary. No one can judge you there.

In the real world, everyone you write to judges you with their *wallet*. It's not pretty, but when you finally break the code on writing killer sales copy, whole markets will bow at your feet and lavish you with wealth.

So, yeah, it's worth a little pain from a vicious critique and rewriting to get this copywriting business

down. As I say *ad nauseum*, this ain't brain surgery... but it *does* take a little discipline.

Most people don't really want to be a writer. They want to have *already written something*, and enjoy the rewards. Minus the work.

Most of the people who call themselves writers fall into this category. They like the aura of being a professional writer... but they shirk the nasty business of putting words on paper the way *good* writers do it -- with detective research work, mapping out the USP, walking a mile in the prospect's shoes... and with *rewriting*.

Now, it's true that -- at this point in my career -- I can sometimes blast out a sales letter that doesn't require massive rewriting.

But I've been doing this for twenty years.

And I never forget that most of my huge winners WERE rewritten many, many times before they were "right". The first mega-successful piece I did for Halbert, when I began working with him, required seventeen drafts.

Seventeen drafts.

I've often spent weeks perfecting other pieces. It just took that long to get the copy to pass the "So what?" test, to rip out the irrelevant tangents and sales-killing mumbling, to find the shortest and most urgent path into the passionate sweet spot of the reader.

To me, this is *not* hard, horrible work akin to chasing rats in sewage pipes. It can be an exhausting process, but you're after a goal... and that goal is reachable, if you want it. I have file folders bulging with testimonials from rookies that prove it.

The exhaustion clears nicely when you reap the rewards of a killer pitch. Fabulous things happen. Your life changes. And financial independence arrives and settles in for good.

Yet, most people refuse to believe this. They think I'm joking when I tell them to trash what they've written and start over with a new approach. *All those words? Wasted? Don't you realize how long it took to type them all?*

Yes, I do realize how long it took. I sympathize... but I won't tell you what you've written is good when it isn't. I'm sure there are plenty of people in your life who will pat you on the back for logging a full two hours at the computer, putting a lot of typing into a Word document.

Gee whiz, Bucko! That's an impressive pile of words there. You must be a writer!

Don't fall into this trap. Your family will praise your effort because they love you. Your business partner will praise it because they haven't got a clue what good advertising is all about anyway. Even some of your clients and customers may rave about your effort, to your face.

None of this matters. The only “jury” that counts when you’re writing a sales pitch is the *cash register*. You can make an English teacher swoon with admiration... but if your piece doesn’t bring in the moolah, it ain’t worth squat.

And -- while, yes, it may take a few rewrites to get it right -- it still is primarily a **SIMPLE PROCESS**, once you know the secrets and the shortcuts.

That’s the basis of everything I teach. There’s no mystery -- *just do what I tell you to do*. It’s like having a guide show you the way across the big damn mountain standing between you and the life you want. Walk over here, and do this. Then walk over there, and do that. Then walk over *there*, and do *that*.

Get to know your audience, so you can fill their needs. Understand the benefits of your product. Find the hook in your appeal. Establish your credibility. Make big promises, and then back them up with proof. Write like you would talk to someone you just met. Et cetera.

I’m not *hiding* any of this, anywhere. I defy you to find this process spelled out any simpler than the shortcuts I have in “**Kick-Ass Copywriting Secrets of a Marketing Rebel**”.

The only way to make it any easier... would be to include a little gnome with each manual that leaps out of the box and runs to your computer to write your sales pitch *for* you.

Well, I’m fresh out of gnomes... so, yes, you must actually sit down and apply these secrets and shortcuts yourself.

It’s not that tough, guys.

And yet, it IS that tough for many folks. Because they *refuse* to do the basic stuff.

Take, for example, one of the “Brain Cleanse” sessions I did at the Dan Kennedy/Bill Glazer “Info Marketing Boot Camp” in Cleveland this November.

Let’s call it **Rediscovery #3**: “*Keep it simple, stupid.*” It’s pure Operation MoneySuck. This guy has all my materials. Everything. And almost everything by every other teacher in the biz -- Halbert, Kennedy, Abraham, you name it. The bookcases in his office must be sagging from the sheer weight.

But it’s obvious he hasn’t read a word of any of it. The ad he wants me to look over doesn’t even rise to the level of a “good effort”. It’s clearly a first draft, grudgingly dashed out with no preparation, no plan, no forethought... and not even a nod toward real salesmanship.

But it sure *looks* nice. He’d paid a designer some ungodly price to make it pretty. Like dressing a pig in Armani and believing that will win the beauty contest.

And, no surprise, he'd already sent it out. Total bomb. He'd have to get *triple* the results to even qualify as a *failure*. It was almost as if the piece had never gone out at all. And it got *worse*. He'd also posted a gorgeous new website to yet another market... and was chagrined to get not a single blessed sale.

“What'd you pay to get the site up?” I asked, innocently.

“Ten grand,” he said, without blushing. “But that included getting the product produced.”

This guy was walking around like a wounded gazelle in hyena town. He was a one-man charity system for designers and mail houses and manufacturers.

Don't be this guy. He had violated the most basic secret of all in business: *Do the simple stuff first.*

I've already covered the prep work for writing your copy. To an outsider, it may seem daunting to do “research”... but it shouldn't to YOU. This is your product, in many cases. You know it better than anybody. And you *should* understand your market, too, or learn to. If you're writing copy for someone else, get into a place where you know the product and market as if it WERE your own.

Use the shortcuts. It's astonishingly easy, once you get into it.

The ten thousand dollar website is another matter, however.

As it turns out, I know something about the market he was after. In fact, I know a LOT about that market.

And you know what? It didn't matter how good the deal was on the website. It didn't matter how efficient the site captured visitors, or how easy it was to buy using the online ordering system. It didn't even matter how gloriously wonderful the product was.

None of this was relevant.

Because there was no market *there*.

This guy spent ten thousand dollars to find out something he *could* have discovered for FREE. And it would have taken him all of about an hour, too... instead of the months he spent creating the product, writing the (bad) copy, and wrangling with the website.

Here are the simple basics: First, do not create the actual product until you get a pulse from your intended market.

Second: Go to Google adwords. You can “test” most online markets without even signing up for the service. It's easy, too. The system will reveal to you how many hits certain words and phrases within your target market received. It will also suggest other words and phrases, based on what is

actually getting the big numbers.

This is *free* market research. Just figure out what a prospect might put into a search engine in order to be in your target audience... and see if the action justifies your foray into this market. If the words and phrases you come up with are not among the most used, Google will tell you, and help you find the better ones.

And... if your and Google's best efforts come up with pitiful results... then you are fishing in an *empty pond*.

Time to move on.

Third: Get your hands on a copy of the SRDS. (That's Standard Rates and Data Service, if you're among those who also have avoided using the shortcuts I've advised.) These are the phonebook-sized catalogs of all mailing lists available to rent, and all magazines that take ads.

This is the book that -- once you take a few minutes to understand it -- will heap *massive* wealth and reward on your head. Because this is the book that *instantly* tells you which markets are hot, and which are not.

What's more, if you're too cheap to buy the service (sign up at www.srds.com and they will send you a brand new updated version quarterly), you can check the SRDS out for FREE at your local library. It's in the resource department.

They're not hiding it.

You don't even need a recent one, in most cases. If your prospective market has existed for a while, you can get your answer from even a *years*-old SRDS. Cuz all you need, at this basic stage, is a thumbs up or thumbs down. There's either a mob of cash-rich people who actively buy stuff in the new market you're considering... or there aren't.

That's *all* you're looking for right now.

In this guy's case, he had decided to go after what he thought was a huge untapped part of an existing market. He didn't *need* to research it -- heck, his own *common sense* told him he was on the right track.

See, everybody was already marketing to the men in this market.

So he decided to go after... big drum roll... *the women*.

Genius!

Except for the inconvenient detail that there WEREN'T any women in this market. I checked it out myself, once I got back to the office. The SRDS had the goods on over a dozen

magazines that catered to this niche. The subscriber numbers were huge... that's why the guy wanted to go after the market... but they were also **97% male**. This detail is plainly revealed in the statistics of each entry.

Just as telling, the available lists of direct response names had a premium of \$12/thousand for male names. **This is a hint:** The men in this market are the ones who buy. The women barely exist.

Bang! Slam the SRDS shut, scratch the whole idea of going to that market. Research job is complete. Even if you had to take a bus across town to the library, your total time expenditure has been minimal.

And you're not out any serious money, except for bus fare and lunch.

That's the free and simple way to tell if your wild-hair idea has merit. If Google had burped up a hundred search engine terms that starving crowds were using... or if magazines and lists were out there catering to exactly the market you were after... then it's off to the races with you and your badass idea. You're in the game.

But not for this guy. Ten grand in costs, and months in wasted time, all before he had done a second's research on the viability of the market.

Actually, I saved him even more grief by putting the kibosh on the project when I did -- he was poised to start running expensive magazine ads. This man was a gravy train for vendors.

I almost feel bad for rescuing him, because now some other clueless sucker will have to fund the lease for the designer's new Porsche.

Rediscovery #4: "*Customer service.*"

No matter how sincere the robot voice on the phone is when it says "We're sorry for the inconvenience, but all operators are busy with other customers", it isn't helping your blood pressure.

The Soviet Union *collapsed* in large part because it strangled on its own bureaucracy, and nothing ever got done. We're now climbing into the same boat ... because geeks without an ounce of social skill are increasingly in charge of customer service.

The last three times I called on some important matter -- why else would I be calling -- each of the three different businesses offered me automated menus with nothing even *remotely* relevant to my problem. The robots were no help at all.

These were a bank, an online vendor, and an insurance company. Joints that survive on customer service.

And they handed it over to *machines*.

Punching zero doesn't always shortcut you to a live human anymore, either. They're getting hip to the ways consumers operate... and like cruel scientists trying to make rats crazy by frustrating their paths through a maze, automated systems are increasingly designed to keep *any* customer service from ever taking place.

(Side note: Swearing into the receiver won't help anymore, either. After being rerouted to the same wrong menu for the third time, I told the robot voice to go perform an unnatural act on itself. As revenge, I was immediately transferred to dead air, and after a puzzling thirty second wait, given a dial tone. Bastards.)

I expect "911" calls to be automated soon -- press one if you are being choked by an intruder, two if your house is burning down, three if you'd like to donate to the Policemen's annual charity ball...

Anyway, during a break in the seminar, John Reese said something that is still resonating with me. He has his sister call each and every new customer... just to make sure their package arrived all right.

He's doing a fairly staggering level of business, mind you.

And it's his *sister* doing the calls.

"Nobody calls anymore, except for moronic telemarketers reading from a script" he said. "And people appreciate an honest call with info."

It's brilliant.

Hey, I'm never looking for more work to do. It's just me and Diane here in the office, and she's only here part-time.

What's more, we already do a pretty good job of emailing new customers to let them know when their package ships. And we have Diane's email address prominent, in case there are questions or problems.

But you know what? Email isn't perfect. In fact, as fast as it travels, it still takes time to compose email copy. And if it comes back as undeliverable, it takes *more* time to track down the problem.

What's a phone call cost these days -- three cents a minutes? Five cents?

At first, Diane was skeptical. But I wanted her to do the calls, because she knew what was going on, and could instantly answer all questions. She didn't need to be charming, either. Just a quick call to let each new customer know their order was processed and to verify the shipping address before sending the goods on their merry way. (We're only calling US buyers.)

In most cases, the call took all of fifteen *seconds*. And it was appreciated -- in fact, we caught several address problems just in time.

The entire thing required a fraction of the effort of emailing back and forth. Dial, quick chat, answer minor question or two, hang up.

There were only three “bad” calls in the bunch. (The test involved over a hundred contacts.) I don’t know what it is about New Jersey, but all three problem calls were to that state. Surly, impatient secretaries actually scolded Diane for calling.

“You don’t need to call just to tell us you’re mailing the package,” one said. And hung up. Well, guess what? That buyer had given us a wrong address, and wound up chasing his Federal Express package all over town. His overprotective secretary never told him we’d called.

Still, there ended up being much less of the missed connections we usually have relying solely on email contact. And we still *use* emails -- but we’ve added that quick phone call for a while, just to reach out and touch new customers.

It works, both to complete the sale happily, and to further the bonding process with a new customer. When people order from my website, they don’t really know if I’m a big organization or a small office. Many expect to be treated like a number, another brick in the wall. These are the ones who appreciate the personal touch the most.

We’ve always used that personal touch, even in email. Diane doesn’t try to sound like some corporate drone when she writes -- she’s a person, writing to another person. The vast majority of email we send out is unique to the situation at hand.

It’s just us, writing to you.

Other business owners go pale when they consider such a personalized attitude. And maybe, if you’re dealing with massive populations every day, there’s no way around being a little impersonal.

But I sit down to my desk every workday and face a daunting pile of mail and email. I enjoy plowing through it, mostly. So what if it takes me an hour or so to take the time to email back?

I mean it -- so what?

It’s like the tactic I teach on how to use your notes to maximum effect. My advice is: Don’t put all your *notes* on the computer, where they’re all tidy and efficient. Instead... keep messy file folders stuffed with 3x5 notecards and napkins and torn matchbook covers where you’ve scrawled your thoughts. When it comes to nurturing creativity, neatness works *against* you.

All those carefully filed notes in your computer will do you little good, because they’re hidden away.

But those messy folders can *ignite* your brain. Take the notecards and scraps of paper out regularly, juggle the order of importance, tape similar ones together, jot new notes on top of the old notes.

Spread them out on your desk, and let them stare back at you. Circle, highlight, and draw doodles in the blank spaces. Let the fact a certain note is on a napkin from another city remind you of the circumstances behind the idea.

Work in the real world, where you can touch, see and smell things.

It's the same with your customers. You can assign them numbers for easy filing, find the perfect place in your database for their inclusion, be precise and efficient and orderly. And lose track of their *humanness*.

Bottom line, your customer IS your business.

Don't treat him like electric sheep. A large number of people base their buying decision not on price, or even quality... but on *service*. It's true.

And yet, I've heard rumors that even Dell, the computer giant, is reconsidering the concept of offering free customer service. It's just getting too expensive and troublesome.

Hell, service was the reason I abandoned Gateway for Dell in the first place. I bought three computers from Gateway over the years (yeah, yeah, I know)... and spent an average of six days with each one trying to get it to work. Their customer service ranged from bad to awful.

I had friends in South Dakota who *worked* for Gateway (in the legal department, no less). I had *connections*... and I still couldn't get them to send me a computer that wasn't screwed up in the shop and required massive hand-holding.

I'm on my second computer from Dell. I shouldn't have been impressed that both worked right out of the box -- you'd think a multi-thousand dollar piece of equipment WOULD work in the first place.

But after my Gateway debacles, I *was* impressed.

Later, when I encountered problems, Dell's customer service was great. At first, anyway. Then, one day I found myself talking (barely) to someone in Bombay who insisted that I reinstall the *entire operating system* to fix a minor glitch, followed by a guy in Panama who, while knowledgeable, kept talking about this woman he knew in Oregon he was going to visit and maybe marry so he could stay in the US.

Now, if the rumors are true, I may soon not even have the pleasure of fun, inventive help from the global village as part of the deal. I'll have to *pay* for that privilege -- perhaps the way rental car companies ask you to gamble on insurance.

As a buying customer, I have now become a PROBLEM to this company. *I'm* the problem. *I'm* the one causing executives headaches, because I had the unmitigated gall to buy their product and *expect it to work*.

Think about this for a minute, in regard to your own situation.

I have advised clients, for years, to NOT put a minimum wage, distracted, passive-aggressive and uninformed receptionist in the lobby of their offices... and especially not to let them be the first person to *talk* to anyone calling your business.

This is often the very fragile beginning of the big damn funnel that leads to you, personally. Trust me -- you don't want that delicate initial contact to be *bad*.

Yet most businesses do *exactly* that, by staffing their funnel with people who would rather be partying or shopping -- and before prospects are ten feet inside your door, or before they've reached you on the phone, they have been ignored, insulted, and frustrated.

Oh, wait, that's the OLD economy style. Nowadays, companies let ROBOTS handle the ignoring, insulting and frustration.

Good luck asking your prospect to buy after that.

I recently had a doctor offer me two options for care on something. This was my *health and well-being* we were discussing, and he seemed to be leaving the final decision to me.

“What would you advise if I were your *brother*?” I asked.

Oh, he said quickly, I'd definitely urge him to do the first option.

You know, that's not a bad way to figure out how to treat someone.

What if your customer *were* your brother? Would you take just that tiny extra effort? Sure you would.

And guess what? Your new customer is even *more* important than your brother, in important ways. After all... *when was the last time your brother sent you a wad of money?*

Rediscovery #5: Okay, one last item from my excellent adventure in Cleveland at the seminar. It, too, is related to Operation MoneySuck.

I call it “*Don't Aspire To Be A Fat Cat.*”

Let me explain: One of the things you realize, when you read rock and roll history, is that the vast majority of artists were financially raped by the record companies.

It's not even a surprise plot point when they do movies of the old heroes anymore. The audience takes it for granted the pompadour'd singer with the guitar and the gee-whiz smile is gonna get screwed by The Man.

It's the way too many businesses also operate in this economy and -- let's be frank -- they do it because (a) they can... and (b) it's often *very profitable*.

As long as they get away with it, of course.

This is why advertisers rate down among lawyers and politicians in the respect department.

They *deserve* the low ranking, because they lie. Brazenly, too.

The pharmaceutical industry is a great example. They discovered, much to their delight, that dumping a massive payload of advertising cash into the public arena worked with Viagra. "Ask your doctor" was, of course, code for "Insist on this stuff."

Profit is a powerful intoxicant. And they wanted more. So they started marketing more serious drugs the same way.

Unfortunately, they forgot to *test* drugs like Vioxx adequately... and a big "Oops", no matter how heartfelt, will not stay the vengeance of a public outraged over being duped. People died, and no amount of clever marketing can fix that.

As an entrepreneur, you are *nuts* if you look to the large companies for clues on how to run your business. They don't even pretend to care about the customer anymore.

Their attitude is: Just get the money. Figure out the details later.

That is *soooo* stupid.

The reason for refusing to follow this "screw the customer" model is not karma, as you may have suspected. (Though your eternal soul may yet be on the line.)

No. The real reason is something Dan Kennedy so eloquently talked about during his time on the stage: **Your true wealth in business is in the care and nurturing of your "herd"**.

Your list of buyers and interested prospects, in other words.

Large corporations don't "do" back ends, for the most part. It's all about the initial sale.

Savvy entrepreneurs know better. The *real* money is in the sales you make *after* you bring someone into your world. Some of the best (small) marketers out there are willing to acquire a customer at a *loss*, in fact... because they know that subsequent purchases will make up for the acquisition cost tenfold.

Large companies rely on unproven voodoo "branding" to multiply sales. They've all sipped their own Kool-Aid, and really believe that once you try their product, you're wedded to them for life.

Cuz, you know, they have such *cool* commercials.

The record companies got away with cannibalizing their own artists through contracts and legal tricks.

And guess what? As an entrepreneur, you also enter into a contract of sorts with each customer. It's a deal, built not on a handshake or a written document, but on the exchange of money and promises.

That's what sets the entrepreneur apart from the soulless corporation -- *you are only as good as the product you deliver*. The fly-by-night rip-off marketers will never get that backend sale, because they've destroyed the delicate "contract" between seller and buyer.

The equation is simple: Offer a fair deal... prove that it's fair by delivering on all your promises... and *continue* to deliver on it as your relationship with your customer evolves.

Tend your herd, and it will support you forever.

Need More Carlton Advice?

His first course for marketers is a transformational thrill-ride you can devour in a weekend...

... yet, it will completely arm you with the simple-yet-brutally-effective advertising chops required to slaughter your competition and dominate your niche as quickly as possible.

It's called "Kick-Ass Copywriting Secrets of a Marketing Rebel"... and you cannot even imagine yet how much advanced business know-how and specific selling tactics this easy-to-absorb course short-cuts for you.

This is what to do next, and how to do it for maximum results... from creating your first product, to finding and persuading your first mob of deliriously-happy customers, to quickly establishing yourself as the most dangerously-good competitor in your niche.

When you're ready, zip over to John's notorious blog at <http://www.john-carlton.com> and click on the "Kick-Ass Copywriting Secrets" icon in the right hand column (under "Stuff To Buy").

Your satisfaction is, of course, guaranteed. You don't risk anything by seeing what's up.

This is, after all, the same course that sits on so many successful entrepreneurs' desks, dog-eared and well-used as the main resource guide for creating ads and fortifying all marketing channels.

Chapter Eight: Chops And Chutzpah...

The one great secret to writing killer copy, invisible salesmanship, escaping corporate creeps out to corral your creative process, and why your invitation to the big party hasn't arrived yet. Oh, and beware the over-confident moron.

Forgive me if I've gone off on the following subject before. But it's just too important for serious marketers to ignore. It's a ride worth taking a couple of times, until you "get" it.

Here's the headline: The most incompetent people in your life... *have no clue whatsoever they are incompetent.*

Proof of this astonishing news comes to you from Cornell University, where researchers were left slack-jawed at what they discovered. Not only do incompetent people not realize their propensity to screw things up beyond hope... but they also *consistently register absurdly high on the self-confidence scales.*

In other words... even as they botch up everything they touch... in their mind, they believe their abilities and talents are actually *better* than everyone else's.

This would be amusing if the consequences weren't so catastrophic.

They are not just taken aback when you complain about the quality of their work.

They simply *do not believe you*. You must be brain-dead not to realize how lucky you are to have them in your life. Regardless of facts, they will humor your silly insistence on doing "a better job"... and simply continue with their own agenda.

In the research, the yo-yo's who scored the *worst* in tests requiring logic, grammar and humor (hmmm -- this may explain those fallow years of Saturday Night Live)...

... were also the same *folks* who grossly *over-estimated* how well they had performed.

This explains why Bubba, the auto mechanic who can't seem to fix your leaky radiator, feels completely qualified to tell you how to beat the stock market. Stick around long enough, and he'll explain the mysteries of women to you, too. And then move on to solving the world's political woes.

Meanwhile, your car has been doomed by his incompetence. (I once got half a block down the road with four guys from the auto repair joint running after me, screaming. After changing my oil, Bubba had neglected to screw in the oil pan plug, and I was lucky the engine didn't blow. As it was, Bubba was mad at me for spilling oil all over the shop floor. In his mind -- somehow, some way -- he was absolutely not at fault. It simply wasn't possible, since he was such a competent, highly-skilled and

able dude.)

The bad news is... there are more incompetents than competents out there. They outnumber us.

And they inhabit every single strata of society and business. They're your boss, your brother-in-law, your partner and the guy in charge of security at the airport.

The good news is... well, heck. There really *isn't* any good news to this discovery. Maybe the fact the shrinks have finally taken notice will speed along some sort of cure.

You betcha.

I used to think that civilization chugged along in *spite* of the human beings running the show. Somehow, perhaps with the help of angels or invisible aliens, the power stays on and trains run almost on time and the Cheerios stay stocked in the stores.

But here's a different take on this: Isn't it just as likely that the world runs because it was designed to work *with* incompetent morons at the helm?

It makes sense. If nuclear reactors really required Einstein at the controls instead of Homer Simpson, we'd have all been reduced to splotches of bubbling carbon long ago.

So, okay. What's this got to do with marketing?

Plenty, of course. I see two immediate ways to make good use of this information:

Immediate Way #1: Pay attention to the people around you. If you've been scratching your head because a colleague seems to be a total screw-up, yet he's convinced you with his polished confidence that he is actually your best asset...

... now you know.

Get rid of him if you can. If you cannot fire or kill him, at least *insulate* him from the important parts of your life and business.

He and his ilk will destroy you and everything you've built... without even realizing what they've done. Or bothering to acknowledge it.

I remember a guy who owned a sound system my band occasionally borrowed for shows. We let him sit at the controls, because it was his equipment, but we *never* let him set the levels because he was a complete nincompoop.

Still, every single night, I would watch from the stage in horror as he fixated on some dial or switch, his mind churning like a broken garbage disposal...

... until he would reach out and -- very confidently -- touch something and send everyone shrieking out of the room from the sudden assault of feedback.

And he would always be so *astonished* that the feedback had occurred, miraculously, at the same time he'd hit the switch. Certainly, it was nothing *he'd* done.

So get your own sound system, if you have to. Do whatever is necessary. You will pay and pay and pay for the blunders and missteps of the nitwits if you don't get hip and do what needs to be done to free yourself.

And... when you find people who actually do what they say they'll do, and follow through on projects with skill and conscience... *hang on tight*.

I've had enough different clients over the years to populate a small city. Yet only a meager handful had the ability to follow directions, and the sense to realize when the plan I gave them was the right way to go.

And I've held onto those clients for years, even when there was better money to be made with new ones. Because the pain of watching your carefully written campaigns crash and burn because of gross incompetence just sucks the life from you.

Beware the over-confident moron.

Immediate Way #2: Just get used to the fact that your customer base is heavily populated with these whack-jobs.

You can't fire your customers willy-nilly. As long as their checks clear, you wouldn't want to, anyway. (Though you may occasionally want to hunt them down and read them a riot act.)

But knowing about the intellectual density of many people will both soothe your nerves (when you must deal with their absurd complaints and irrational requests)... and help you adjust your marketing accordingly.

Let me explain. A very critical copy point we all tend to forget is to remind the prospect:

“It's Not Your Fault!”

It's an excellent term to work into copy when you're trying to convince the reader to change from destructive behavior (like being broke all the time, or getting bullied at the beach, or stocking up fat cells like a bear prepping for hibernation) to whatever program you have for him.

Of course, we now know that in many cases it really *is* his fault he's screwed everything up so badly.

Nevertheless, he may be incapable of realizing it. And he will welcome your assurances.

You can, with the right ego-less attitude, bond even with aggressively-incompetent customers.

In fact, you *must* do this... because they may make up the majority of your list.

You can help them... but you will likely never *change* them.

Final note: If, horrors, you suspect *you* may be one of these poor guys... well, the shrinks did suggest taking a college-level course in logical reasoning might help.

It's an uphill climb, however. The over-the-top self-confidence of the incompetent is real, not faked. Yes, even though it's misplaced confidence, it's there like a brick wall around the person. Realistic self-assessment can't penetrate.

You actually live in your own little world, where everyone *else* is in denial about your greatness.

And it was just a *coincidence* that 100,000 pieces of mail just went out with insufficient postage.

Tales From The Vice Squad

Let's continue with lessons learned while dealing with incompetent people.

As a kid growing up among the vineyards and foothills of Cucamonga, I was haunted by the notion that *everyone* else knew things I would never be privy to.

Then I came across my first Playboy magazine... and I was suddenly offered *proof* there was a party going on that I wasn't invited to.

This is a recurring topic in my long running conversations with Gary Halbert. We both were mesmerized as young men by Hugh Hefner's lifestyle -- hanging out all day and night in your pajamas, surrounded by gorgeous young things who couldn't seem to keep their own pee-jays on.

How the *hell*, we wondered obsessively, do you go about getting *invited* to that party?

In a very significant way, this frustration formed the paths our careers took.

For Gary, that path went through Hollywood and New York city and Miami Beach, buzzing around the ocean in tricked-out boats and staring down the maitre'd at Toot Shor's, always with a pretty girl nearby.

For me, the path wound through the be-bop hinterlands of America's counter culture. Dancin' in the moonlight, the sexual revolution, the occasional incoherent chat with God.

Heck, I think I once played poker with the Devil. Bastard cheats.

Anyway... there came a time when getting that invite to the Playboy mansion was within reach. I sat

in a cushy office on Sunset Blvd., in a building where every elevator ride was shared with a different celebrity, and I was hanging with a guy who was so well-connected in Hollywood that he could get us a table at Spago's with an hour's notice. (While crowds of people who'd had reservations for six months languished in the waiting room.)

And you know what? I didn't want to go.

Well, okay, a part of me was still interested, if only for the bragging rights.

But a bigger part of me just didn't give a damn anymore. The "party" at Hef's place suddenly seemed more like a silly adult version of Disneyland than something vital and enticing.

So I never went.

After ten years in the wasteland of Los Angeles, I'd reached an important realization: **The rich and the famous were most definitely NOT having a better time than I was.**

In my entire life, there aren't more than a handful of days I wouldn't happily relive. I wasn't aware of it most of the time... but I was waking up every single morning to another chapter of a grand adventure.

It was a BIG DEAL to finally realize this. And stop obsessing on the party I felt I was missing out on.

One of the biggest appeals in advertising is the promise of a different, better life. A sudden, jolting change, where money worries vanish, sex is plentiful, and the world cowers at your feet. Or some version of that.

And this appeal forever remains untainted by the dire warnings of those who will tell you that fame has its costs, money can't solve emotional problems, and even wild orgies can grow tiresome very quickly. All of which is true.

However... it's important for marketers to understand that most people lead lives of quiet desperation.

They don't get to meet interesting people, or do interesting things, or go to interesting places.

They are bored shitless. And convinced that life could be a bed of roses if only... if only...

... if only they could find a way to get invited to The Party.

I am not an evangelist on this matter. I'm not going to bang my head against the wall trying to get you to see the truth. But I will share my observations, in the vain hope that at least a few people will catch the hint.

Here's what I'm talking about: I don't know what brought you to your business. But I'm pretty

sure you weren't "invited".

I certainly was not invited into the ranks of copywriters. The corporate world kept spitting me out, because I was such a bad fit in the tie-wearing, don't-color-outside-the-lines, 9-to-5 culture. I stumbled into the entrepreneurial field entirely as a result of not finding *anywhere else* to land.

I'm glad it worked out this way, of course... but it was a bumpy ride.

And one day, after decades of bouncing around the American dream, I suddenly realized how *lucky* I was. I'd somehow managed to chew through a wide swath of crucially-important adventures few people ever experienced.

And this is what I learned:

First... the reason I believed, as a kid, that everyone else (both adult and fellow child) knew vital secrets I didn't...

... was because I had assumed their smug confidence and bravado had to be based on something *real*.

Now, I know the truth: They weren't thinking thoughts that I wasn't privy to. Nope. *They weren't thinking at all*. Most of the time, there wasn't a single thought in their heads.

They were coasting on vapor.

Second... the only reason the party I wasn't invited to seemed so much better than the party I was at... was simply a twisted version of the grass being greener on the other side.

As Halbert says, "I know exactly what I don't want in life... and it's always what I *already have*."

I'll spare you the gory details... but the average weekend party we threw in college, for almost no money at all... *easily* rivaled the best million-dollar fiesta Hef has ever hosted for fun and wildness. (I've even met shrinks who insist the poor guy is actually depressed. Possibly because there's no challenge left in his life.)

I've hung with celebrities. They are the most boring people on the planet. (As Marlon Brando once noted, a movie star is someone who, if you ain't talking about them, they ain't listening.)

I've hung with rich folks, and with near-penniless desperados. More often than not, money will make you fat and lazy and uninteresting. It's no fun starving to death, either, but for many the risk of losing your essence increases with every buck you pack away.

And, I've hung with corporate CEOs, big-time wheeler-dealers, and women so stunningly beautiful they take your breath away.

Scratch the surface of any of them, and you may back away in horror at what you find underneath. Many of them see you as *food*, at best. Many of the rest are nothing more than angry, frightened children in grown-up clothes and masks of make-up.

Lastly: Abe Lincoln was right -- most people are about as happy as they make up their mind to be.

I am blessed with a deep list of good friends and colleagues. People who can lift my spirits in a two-minute chat. People I rely on, and who rely on me and make my life full and robust.

And the one big realization I am so thankful of having... is that these people have provided me with a *life-long* “party” more exciting and more satisfying than anything else going on, anywhere.

Because the key to a great party is a roomful of vital, interesting friends. Not celebrity, not showy banquets, not tits and ass.

Life is *already* a grand adventure... however, most people choose to pretend it isn't.

And the punch-line is... all you have to do is *wake up* to get back in the groove.

As a marketer, understanding the depth and urgency of raw *need* in your target population is critical. This is where world-class sales pitches begin to foment. **It's the basic ingredient.**

But more important... if you truly desire success, you cannot run off thinking it's built on fame, money and power.

Because it isn't. Some of the richest people I've met are also the most miserable. No matter where they are, they're convinced the “real” party is across town. And they weren't invited.

When you're truly successful, you're the party. If your life isn't vibrant and stimulating right now, then changing that condition is a big part of your current job.

Remember -- *most people don't get to do this*. They're stuck in normal jobs, numbed by television and caged by their own refusal to risk breaking out of their comfort zone.

And here you are, smack in the middle of the most exciting and urgent part of the business world.

Entrepreneurs rock. You're part of the life-blood of the planet. Other people wish they had your cojones.

When you've got your biz cooking on all cylinders, *you're* the party everyone wants to get invited to.

So. Are you having fun yet?

How-To Department

All right, enough with the philosophical foolishness.

Let's get into some meat here. **How would you like to learn one of the great secrets of creating over-the-top world-class copy?**

I call it "Chops and Chutzpah". (Actually, I call it "balls and chops", but I enjoy torturing my girlfriend by using Yiddish as much as possible.) (Usually incorrectly.)

Here's what the phrase means: To create outrageously-compelling copy, you combine earthy, real *personality*... with honest, real worth...

... and *push hard* for action.

This is the opposite of the Milquetoast way most advertisers approach the sale. They want to appear as bland as possible, believing that blending into the background is preferable to possibly *offending* someone by being too "pushy".

Nonsense. Blending into the background will make your advertising invisible. You're wasting money, effort and time.

And yes, by stepping up and showing a little personality and salesmanship, you *do* risk offending some people.

So what? The only way *not* to offend some folks is to stand very still and avoid speaking at all.

Never, ever, *ever* gauge your advertising by the complaints you get.

Rather, gauge it by the *money it brings in*.

And yes, you can go too far with this. I find myself cringing at some of the ads I've "inspired" that are sent in for critiques. The copy reads like it was written by an angry, potty-mouthed psychopath... and the offer has strong suggestions that he will personally stalk you if you do not buy right away.

Wrong approach, guys. Most people understand the need to have "chops". This means you aren't just a bragging, empty suit with nothing of value to offer... but, rather, you have something of *honest worth* to sell.

This is *important*. No matter how good your ad is, if your product gets the "oh, yuck" reaction when it arrives, you've got a marketing problem.

But most people stumble on the "chutzpah" angle.

So let's get this straight: **It's NOT about bullying your reader with power words, or assaulting them with attitude.**

It *is* about “speaking their language”. My golf ads created such a firestorm in the magazines because no one had ever written to golfers in that “just you and me having a beer and talkin’ golf” tone before. It simply wasn’t done.

But I had tapped into exactly the way many golfers *really speak to each other*. Not with affront, not with churlishness, and not patronizingly. (Go ahead, look those words up.)

No. With *real* language. But not for the sake of being clever.

Good writing is *invisible* to the reader -- he should *not* be aware he’s reading something. Instead, your copy should smoothly melt into the conversation *already going on in his head*.

You aren’t creating the parade he’s in. You’re just standing in front of the existing one and getting in the groove.

Let me drive this point home by sharing a critique I gave recently.

The subscriber -- a very savvy young marketer named Tom -- was creating fresh ads for some gyms in New York. The headline he wanted to use went something like “Yo! Are You Lookin’ For A Friggin’ Gym?”

And his partner was horrified, and refused to run it. (He actually said, I believe, “Yo! Guys in Brooklyn don’t friggin’ talk that way!”)

God forbid they should insult any sensitive New Yawkers.

Here’s my reply:

Hi Tom...

Are you kidding me? That’s a GREAT headline. I don’t know if you can get it past the Yellow Page censors... but if you can, I think it’s killer.

You know, people tried to talk me out of using “kick ass” in my course title. They really, really, really (deep in their little hearts) believed I would be mocked and run out of town on a rail.

Actual result: It gets attention, people LOVE to “hear it like it is”, and -- big secret point -- the fact that I can back it up with actual useable advice leaves their heads spinning.

If you got the goods, man, don’t hide behind false humility. Stand up and claim what’s yours. People follow leaders with balls and chops.

Also, a little “edgy” language sets the tone for what they’re about to experience as subscribers to my stuff. They aren’t shocked when I use strong words (though I NEVER swear gratuitously -- only for occasional effect)... and, in fact, they enjoy being titillated.

Life is boring most the time. Be a bright spot in your reader's lives. Be the one thing they read in that section of the YP that wakes 'em up and gets their blood moving.

I don't know anything about Brooklyn. I spent a week in Manhattan 15 years ago with a friend who owned a building on the edge of the Village. (One day we walked -- walked -- from Wall Street to Sara Lawrence college... 90 friggin' blocks... so I saw a lot of the town.) I'm a California boy. You know, surfin', mellow attitudes, rock and roll.

Punk rock could have never been invented in LA. You can't muster the needed rage when it's sunny all the time.

So the essence of a Brooklyn existence is not something I can call up without research.

Nevertheless, I know a ballsy approach when I see one.

Anyway, you can do something like "Yo, What're You Lookin' At?" (Or whatever rings a bell in the mind of your intended audience -- yes, even if it's a little corny.)

But you can't rest on outrageousness. What you want to do is to get attention... and then get down to biz in your copy, immediately. Something like this: "Seriously -- are you looking for a gym that makes women feel safe and happy... makes hard-core bodybuilders ecstatic... and lets your average 'just tryin' to get back in shape fast' Brooklynite have fun while getting a great workout, or playing some racquetball, or just hanging out in the coolest, cleanest and most happening modern gym this side of Manhattan?"

Okay, that's a long sentence, but I'm pulling this outa thin air here.

I don't know what your USP is, what your main list of benefits are, why most people join and stay. But what you want in a good YP ad is an arresting headline, followed by punchy copy that hits a hot button every few words.

For me, a non-serious iron slinger, I want to know I'm welcome to go play r-ball or basketball without having to navigate the grunt-and-sweat guys with the bad attitudes. (Certain some well-known chain-gyms are notorious for confrontations in the weight room. Very bad PR.)

The women I know want lots of seriously silly aerobics stuff, and they want to feel like they aren't gonna be the entertainment for horny guys or get hit on between classes.

Unless they want it.

And the hard bodies want a room they can stretch out in, without a lot of skinny wannabe's hogging the bench press.

Create a quick "virtual scene" with your copy, describing the gym in ways that entice all the groups

you want to bring in.

Again, I think it's good iron, lots of women, safety, roomy, eat-off-the-floor clean, staff dedicated to keeping you happy.

That help?

John

Do you see what I'm getting at? The "issue" of the language ("Yo!" and "friggin") may or may not be a problem. But you can make it moot, by immediately focusing your copy on "chops".

The key to a great ad is to combine winning personality... with some honest kick-ass *substance*...
... in a clear, convincing sales message.

Don't get hung up on the idea that to wake your reader up, you have to be undignified or aggressive.

You don't. Real copywriting power comes from a *skillful balance* of shaking the reader awake, while delivering on large promises.

Remember: Cunning, ruthlessness and street savvy salesmanship -- combined with honest worth -- beats idealism, bravado and aggressiveness every time.

Yo! You friggin' got that?

Coaches Corner

I know I talk a lot about the roundabout way I arrived at being a freelance copywriter. But these stories are important, because they reveal the various truths I learned that, eventually, became the *foundation* of creating world-class advertising.

One of the events that pushed me out of the corporate world was having a full-of-himself vice president -- who had *seen* me working until almost 1 a.m. the night before -- publicly berate me for coming in the next morning 20 minutes late.

Meeting the deadline, to him, was much *less* important than keeping the 9-to-5 lamp burning.

And one of the events that kept me *in* the freelance ranks also involved a "suit".

I was being snuck in the back door at an LA agency to help their copywriting staff pull off some mailings for a fussy client. The mucky-mucks liked my stuff so much, they were dangling a sweet job in their creative department in front of me.

What saved me from succumbing to the lure of the corporate womb... was a short conversation I had

with one of the staff copywriters. I'd noticed her windowless office seemed a little drab and sterile, and asked her why she hadn't put up some posters or something.

"Against the rules," she said in a whisper. "Nothing is allowed on the walls, because the head of the department thinks it would distract us. We can't even have cluttered desks. He insists we have only one piece of paper on the desk at a time."

I laughed, assuming she was joking. The look she gave back nearly broke my heart. She was slaving away under a madman.

Unfortunately, the advertising world is awash in know-nothings who have slimed their way into the top jobs.

And because they don't understand the creative process, they feel they must pretend to be masters at it. And thus, rules are born that make absolutely no sense whatsoever. Especially for the truly creative types who must manufacture the advertising.

My desk looks like a bomb went off. Piles of paper six inches high crowd my monitor, while stacks of equipment and little buckets of pens threaten to fall off the edge at any moment.

On the bookshelf, I have a foot-tall Homer Simpson wind-up doll staring at me (dressed as Santa -- hit the button and he swivels obscenely to bad Christmas songs). Talk about distractions.

Two dogs slumber at my feet. I'm wearing sweats, I'm barefoot, and I'm careful not to sip from yesterday's coffee cup, which sits next to today's.

I don't even own a tie anymore.

And yet I will put my production up against *anyone*, anywhere, who thinks a little sloppiness thwarts creativity.

The great David Ogilvy was a big fan of naps. He would stuff his head full of information, and then go saw off forty zzz's. And awake with a new killer headline.

I do the same thing. It's making full use of the power of your unconscious.

Try nodding off in your corporate office, though, and people will freak out.

I also have little notepads all over the house. Sometimes I wake up in the middle of the night with a burning idea that needs to be written down. And I know I **MUST** write it down immediately, or lose it forever. My "office" includes the kitchen, the back yard, he bedroom, and my car.

I get some of my best organizational thinking done in the *shower*. I relax under the hot water, and I've read somewhere that showers are major producers of negative ions, which are great for soothing the mind and inducing hyper-creative thoughts.

Half the notes on my desk have water spots on them -- I wrote them while still dripping wet. (I gotta get one of those waterproof notepads.)

None of the great writers I know EVER “turns off” the mental machinery. When we’re on a job, we’re on it 24/7, essentially.

We may *look* like we’re watching TV, or staring at the wall, or playing golf. But we’re always a heartbeat away from a breakthrough concept or tactic or idea.

And that’s something the corporate creeps can never understand. You can’t corral the creative process. You can’t *force* it to operate under oppressive conditions.

Keeping your tie cinched and your desk clean because some nut-case veep thinks writers can benefit from his notions of discipline... is just plain insane.

Look. Maybe you’re the kind of guy who needs a Marine drill sergeant screaming at you in order to get your mind moving. That’s fine. Do what works for you.

But I get asked, all the time, what I “do” to get the creative juices flowing. It’s a bad question, really.

The answer is: **You do what you need to do.** If you have to wear a clown suit and play Romper Room ditties in the background, then that’s what you do.

I used to have “writing clothes” I worked in. Filthy sweats, and even a special hat. Putting them on meant I was prepping myself for a session at the desk. (An added advantage was that I couldn’t, in good conscience, leave the house in those reeking togs, which meant I HAD to stay in the office regardless.)

My routine today is very different, because I’ve changed.

The same goes for you. Any rules you have today may -- and probably should -- be altered as circumstances change and your needs evolve.

I just seriously doubt there are any freelancers out there working in their home offices with cinched up ties and clean desks.

Did You Know You Can Get Personal Advice From John Carlton?

You can schedule a one-hour phone consultation with John. They call this one-hour session a "Brain Cleanse", because John go deep into your biz model, sort out and solve problems you identify (and expose problems you may be overlooking), and generally focus our decades of experience on whatever situation you need help with...

... which can include everything related to marketing, writing for your biz, improving your online or offline sales processes, finding more prospects, increasing conversion, smoothing out operations and more.

Note From John: "This is serious business help for people who are serious about fixing problems and getting the best possible insight and advice from a respected, proven professional.

This is NOT cheap. This hour will cost you \$2,500 up front. There is no refund, so be sure I'm the guy you want to consult with before scheduling a session. I've been helping business owners and entrepreneurs and marketers and even other consultants for decades now. I've spent 30 years on the front lines of the biz world, seen it all (from the wildest possible success stories to the most dumb self-destruction of a good biz model) at all levels...

... and if you want that kind of real-world experience put to use for your benefit, then grab this opportunity to talk personally with me. The hour is yours -- you can ask specific questions, or go through specific ads or copy, or just mine my brain for any info, advice or knowledge you need."

Email my personal assistant Diane to set up your consultation (or get your questions about a consultation answered): consult@john-carlton.com

Chapter Nine:

The Burden Of Secrets...

How to ignite the passionate “sweet spot” of your prospect, why your lizard brain craves simplicity, and the two essential ingredients for a con to work.

Can anyone give me a good reason why Phoenix exists at all?

I'm not putting the town down, mind you. I just wonder how it came to be.

Did some exhausted pioneers break a spoke on the way to Californie, throw up their hands and say “Screw it. We're stayin' here.”

I know, I know... you're chuckling to yourself because I live in Reno.

Well, at least Reno has some definable history. There are *reasons* for its existence. Big gold and silver strike in the mid-1800s, later the divorce mecca of America. Gambling, sin, all that cool stuff. And Captain Reno was with Custer, I believe, at the Little Big Horn (and escaped with his scalp). That's not relevant, of course, but we have some history with our soiled reputation.

A phoenix is a mythical bird that rises out of ashes and flies away. The town of Phoenix grew out of hot desert sand and stayed there.

What's up with that?

It's on my mind because I've been coming to Phoenix quite a bit lately. It's sort of replacing Vegas as “seminar central” for many marketers.

And, truth be told, I actually *like* coming to Phoenix for events -- polite staffs at all the hotels, decent facilities, big underused airport.

The last event I spoke at in Las Vegas was in a seedy Rat Pack-era casino, where I paid \$150 for a beer (hey, the poker machine was glaring at me from the top of the bar).

And the taxi driver tried to get me interested in his private stable of hookers on the way from the airport. (Actually, it was fun listening to his pitch, as I am always keenly fascinated by street-wise salesmen. I even wound the story into my lecture the next night. The guy included rave testimonials as third party endorsements, a long list of bullet points with very clever feature/benefit touts, and an urgent call to action. Plus, he really did make it sound like a genuine bargain. No guarantee, though.)

(And no, I didn't bite. Shame on you for thinking so ill of me.)

Wait... where was I?

Oh, yeah. Phoenix.

Hang in there. I do have a point to make.

See, I am in Phoenix right now as the “star” guest speaker at a huge Dan Kennedy Copywriting Boot Camp. His last one, in fact. Hanging up his spurs on that front, apparently. (I hope he changes his mind. There truly is nothing like a good entrepreneur-level seminar to get your blood moving again.)

In preparation for this massive event, I decided to go buy a new house with the girlfriend.

Because... well... because there’s no better way to give your brain that “edge” that is so necessary to teaching... *than to completely overwhelm yourself with a project the equivalent of invading Russia.*

At any rate, it seemed like a good idea at the time.

So there I was, two days ago, panicked over the boot camp and the looming escrow hassles, running over speech ideas for the one event and moving boxes aimlessly in the garage for the other.

Dude, I was cultivating an “edge” as sharp as a sling blade.

And suddenly, for no good reason at all, I actually removed the lid from an ancient cardboard banker’s box (mysteriously labelled “Biz Relics”, whatever I thought that meant when I had labelled it ten years earlier)...

... and there, nearly buried amongst nixies and old bills and tattered detective novels... was a dog-eared file folder labelled “Kennedy notes”.

Inside was the very speech I had given at a copywriting seminar for Dan *over a decade ago*. A killer speech I had seen neither hide nor hair of since moving from L.A. in the early ‘90s, and had, in fact, pretty much forgotten about.

This was *not* like finding a needle in a haystack. This was like finding a needle I wasn’t looking for, in a haystack I didn’t know *existed*.

Now, I incorporated much of that old speech in the one I gave last night at the Boot Camp, and slayed the room. Huge hit. I am *extremely* happy I found the notes on that speech. There were brilliant ideas all through it, each worthy of their own lecture.

It was good stuff. Best talk of my life.

Nevertheless... *what was up with finding those notes in the first place?* I had spent hours in the garage getting stuff ready for the move, without opening a single carton. Then, for no conscious reason, I open this weirdly-labelled box, and dig *straight* for the file folder with a speech in it that hadn’t seen daylight in ten years.

Coincidence? No way.

The strange handiwork of God? I like to think God has better things to do than micro-manage my professional life.

No. This was some *back-water corner of my brain* acting up, never having forgotten the obtuse meaning of the label “Biz Relics”... firing up just enough neurons to make me open it and search for a file I wasn’t looking for (but not firing enough neurons to make me do it *consciously*).

The lesson: Our brains are *waaaay* more complex and conniving than we can ever fathom. Spooky in the way they work.

But there’s a flip side. You see, the premise of that speech was extremely *simple and straightforward*. The best forms of teaching always are. Easily understood, and easy to listen to.

Why did my mind want me to find it?

I couldn’t sleep last night, trying to connect the dots on what had happened. Very complex and mysterious brain. Very simple and straightforward speech.

Complex.

Simple.

Doh! It finally dawned on me.

Listen: Our brain -- yours, mine, everyone’s -- is a humming machine of such intense complexity that we may never completely understand it. BUT...

**It Craves
Simplicity!**

This explains one of most basic fundamental principles of salesmanship...

... the same one that most businesses continually screw up.

Namely: The art of crafting a simple sales message that is easily comprehended... yet also *deeply satisfying* to the data-dense “computer” in your head. Both the twitching, half-feral lizard part of your brain, and the sleek, neurotic, ultra-modern cerebral cortex.

This is actually a *huge* revelation for anyone attempting to master the elusive art of world-class salesmanship.

For years, I’ve been trying to get rookie copywriters to simplify their writing, stop wandering off on intellectual tangents, and calm down the rhetoric, while not losing their edge.

At the same time, I've also been trying to get them to pump up the emotion, make the images more vivid, and titillate the reader's senses.

I call it "getting wicked simple". Grab attention, get the adrenaline flowing, make your case, light a fire under your prospect's ass, and pitch your sale.

It shouldn't be brain surgery.

Now I understand why so many inexperienced writers choke on the close. You have to present your case simply... and yet appeal to the complex soap opera inside your reader's brain.

This is why top writers often fill multiple pages of their ads and letters with riveting bullets that attempt to "surround" the emotions, the intellect, the greed and the fear of their reader.

All at the same time.

In very simple ways.

Think of your prospect's brain as some ridiculously-smart creature from another planet, regarding you warily from a very superior attitude. And yet you know, from experience, that you can win its devotion with something as simple as offering it a cookie.

Complex. Yet simple.

I love it.

Lessons From The Vice Squad

Savvy street hustlers know something most civilians do not: *You can't con an honest man.* You need two critical ingredients in the mix:

1. **Greed** (which is easily understandable), and...
2. **Secrets** (which is less easily understood).

Greed gets the mark hooked -- he's thinking he's gonna make a killing, or pull one over on someone.

But it's the *secret* he carries -- the thought that he is operating almost sociopathically for a change, and feeling damned superior because of it -- that "cooks" the con game.

Whether you're trying to guess which shell the pea is under, or playing pool for money, or buying brand-name merchandise from the trunk of some guy's car...

... if you think you're pulling one over on the hustler, you're meat.

You've just bought into the age-old idea -- once again -- that there could ever be such a thing as a "free lunch".

All great salesmen understand the power of secrets. If you've ever bought "high octane" gasoline for your fancy car, don't snicker at anyone who's bought snake oil health remedies. You've both fallen for a pitch. You've both succumbed to the allure of "secret ingredients".

Secrets are actually an enormous *burden* to most people. Have you ever found, say, a cheaply-priced antique or comic book or coin at a garage sale that you knew was worth a lot of money?

You probably shook with glee and sweated with anticipation as you jammed your couple of bucks into the seller's hand, and actually gloated as you drove off.

Human nature. Most of us have done it.

However... you must also remember how *urgent* it was to share your secret discovery with someone. (Heck, I've known people who were compelled to tell the *seller* of the item what it was really worth, immediately after money exchanged hands. Cruel bastards.)

That "burden" of secrets works in many ways. You have a secret, it's like having ants in your pants. You can hardly stand to have it inside you, percolating and annoying your calmer sensibilities.

Ah... but when you want to KNOW what a secret is... well... it can be *worse*.

And that's why so many hall-of-fame ads are nearly entirely "blind" -- full of teasing about the life-changing secrets you will learn. But only after you've bought the product.

I can't count the number of times colleagues (really good copywriters themselves) have admitted to me they bought some product in an ad I'd written... not because they wanted the product (which they KNEW was similar to products they already possessed)...

... but because they actually *couldn't sleep* until they found out what a particular secret was I'd teased them with in the copy.

One secret, in a 12-page letter dense with other sales points. Igniting the passionate "sweet spot" of the reader.

One super-juicy secret can make the sale.

No one is immune. The entire world is sitting around staring at locked doors all around them... and when you come along, offering the key to the secrets behind those doors, you earn undying trust and gratitude.

Remember this: One of the great secrets of great salesmanship... *is secrets*.

Salesmanship 101

Are you nice and comfy in your little world? Agree with your friends about politics and literature and sit-coms? Seldom argue about where to go eat, or what movies to see?

Well, *stop* it. Right now.

Because, if you want to be a world-class salesman, you can't allow yourself to get flabby inside a tight little existence. You need to hone your edges. Get dirty once in a while.

Get *uncomfortable*.

In most businesses, your customers are NOT going to be like you. They won't think like you, behave like you, or live like you.

In fact, if you ever really got to know them... you might find you intensely disliked them. They are often that fundamentally different.

This is easily explained. For one thing, the mere fact you are in business -- and thus taking responsibility for something -- separates you from the vast majority of the great unwashed hordes out there buying your stuff. Most people abhor responsibility. They shudder at the prospect of action. They fear change, and their guts twist at the very thought of risk.

Yet, your differences can go even deeper than that. You, as a salesman and advertiser and marketer, must be *conscious* of the world and everything in it.

And this consciousness sets you apart.

Get out of your comfort zone. Start today. Go buy a magazine you've never read before. Better yet, read one you're embarrassed to be seen buying. The National Enquirer. Cosmo. Rolling Stone. The National Review. Mother Jones.

Playboy.

Start watching television shows that make you cringe, or shake with anger, or turn the sound down on so your kids won't hear.

Go eat at all the ethnic restaurants in town. Even the ones that cook up parts of animals you thought were supposed to be thrown away.

And get some friends outside of your usual circle. Go out to lunch with the plumber, or the guy who always busts your chops at the barbershop, or one of your kid's teachers. Get into social situations where you cannot safely spout your usual political nonsense without pissing somebody off, or being challenged on your facts.

Get your safety zone shaken to its core.

Why? Because you're a friggin' *salesman* now.

And that means you must be MORE a part of the world than your customers. They can go about their lives half-asleep, unchallenged, snuggled into the familiar. *You*, however, must gobble that fruit from the tree of knowledge, and embrace it.

A couple of very cool things will happen when you do this. First, you will discover that the world really is a land of wonders and adventures and romance and things you never dreamed of before. You will actually feel your soul *expanding*.

It's good for you.

And, second, you will "arm" yourself with **potent bonding tools** which will instantly put you in touch with the deepest desires and needs and fears of the people you reach with your advertising.

You will eventually come to know your customers *better than they know themselves*. Because you are consciously examining the world.

These tools are priceless when dealing with large markets.

But they are worth FORTUNES when dealing with niche markets.

I've known a lot of businessmen who didn't understand the niche they were in, despite eating, breathing and living it. They were too absorbed in their own comfortable "niche within the niche", unable to see the Big Picture because of their long-held prejudice and bias. (This includes golf equipment manufacturers who created stuff most golfers didn't really want... diet product pitchmen who insisted that everyone should follow the same obsessive/compulsive program they did to lose weight... and even restaurateurs who never really understood why people came to their joints, and failed by capriciously changing the atmosphere or menu or location.)

When you become conscious of the world... and actively seek out those parts that are not in your comfort zone, and entertain offbeat ideas without judging them against your old habits... your salesmanship skills become amazingly powerful.

You *can* sell by inflaming the dreams of others... but you *cannot* sell from inside your own dream.

Wake up and smell the money.

How-To Department

I've used lots of grabbers in my time. You know what a grabber is, right? It's something you attach to your sales letter to "grab" the reader's attention. It can take the place of a headline, or work in

tandem with one.

The most common type of grabber I've used is money. I have attached pennies, nickels, dollar bills, twenty-dollar bills, hundred dollar bills and fake million dollar bills to the tops of letters.

Also checks, made out to the recipient. And lottery tickets, good for the next game. And pesos.

I've also used "widow's mites" -- 2,000 year-old coins unearthed from the Holy Land. (They're fragile and odd-looking, but remarkably cheap. Our ancestors kept them in the equivalent of piggy banks, forgot about them... and modern excavations of ancient sites uncover mounds of the coins frequently.) You can tell a pretty damn good story about that widow's mite in the small plastic pouch attached to the top of a letter.

I've also mailed tiny sacks of sand, pencils, photos (real photos held by paper clips, not just printed on the page), magnets, and packets of flower seeds.

When done right, grabbers can send results through the roof.

It's no longer just a letter arriving at your prospect's mailbox -- it's a lumpy envelope full of *secrets*. You get the same reaction from your reader as the prize in the bottom of a box of Cracker Jacks affects a kid. "What the heck is *in* there, anyway?"

You don't even have to necessarily directly tie the grabber into your sales pitch to be effective. Gary Halbert perfected the dollar bill mailing, opening his letter with a brief (and much ripped-off) paragraph saying "As you can see, I have attached a dollar bill to the top of this letter. Why have I done this? The answer is simple: I have something very important to share with you, and needed some way to catch your attention quickly. And... since what I have to tell you involves a lot of money... I figured a dollar bill was the perfect 'eye catcher'."

And guess what? There are many, many businesses and products "involved with money".

That same grabber and opening could be used with products as diverse as biz op programs, financial newsletters, insurance companies... even the local car wash (if you can make the case that you'll save a ton of money going there).

Replace "dollar bill" with "packet of aspirin" in the above example, and you can introduce a product or service that relieves your headaches -- whether it's a massage therapist or a company that handles the yuckier parts of your business day, like accounting or payroll or janitorial.

You get the idea.

Anyway... twice now, while in Phoenix, I have met a guy who appears to have access to every kind of offbeat, goofy, or otherwise effective grabber there is.

He recently sent me a box of goodies that is still ticking, twitching and occasionally beeping from the

far corner of my office. I dived into that box as soon as it arrived, and after an hour of pulling out and playing with palm-sized computers that walked across my desk... tiny pouches that expanded into full backpacks... and spring-loaded little things that almost seem alive.

I had to banish the box from my desk area, so I could get back to work.

This marketer has scoured the world markets for the coolest gadgetry and most intriguing objects I've ever seen. There are so many possibilities here. I always will consider the dollar bill as the "king" of grabbers... but this world-market stuff comes in a close second.

And he swears you can get it all at dirt-cheap prices. If you have ever mailed a buck to someone (and marvelled at the response)... then you must consider using a grabber that costs around a buck, and see what kind of response it gets.

The best test is to mail your "lumpy" package... then call a day or so later. Tell your prospect you're the guy who sent the letter with the whatever attached. I guarantee he'll say: "Oh yeah, I got that letter." And you've just gotten your first "nod" -- a positive response.

For many top salesmen, that's all they need to begin closing the deal.

Ship of Fools Department

I talk a good game about controlling your workday and keeping Operation MoneySuck going at full tilt.

But even with all the "attitude tools" I've gathered over the years, I still get overwhelmed at times.

Like, oh, today, for example.

I'm speaking at a seminar, helping with the hour-to-hour logistics of the event, making deals and doing a little selling... while checking messages from my office every 15 minutes to see what fresh horror is evolving with this move into a new house that is happening concurrently.

You know you're pushing the boundaries of multi-tasking when you find yourself trying to brush your teeth, pull on socks, answer the door for room service and make notes for a meeting, while giving instructions over the cell phone to your assistant back home. (Right now, there's toothpaste all over my socks, and I apparently told my assistant to just set the tray on the desk, which confused her no end.)

Some people operate just fine in chaos. I know writers who pen killer copy in busy airports, and business owners who juggle dozens of projects in their head without dropping a single one.

I can't do that. I don't even try.

Instead, I've come to understand a basic principle of human behavior I call "The Laundry List

Theory". Explaining it has helped everyone I've shared it with.

Here's how it works: Each of us has a certain number of "things to do" we can handle at one time without going into a panic. It varies wildly from person to person.

Some folks can go all day long plowing through a list of duties that would choke a drill sergeant, and others have nervous breakdowns when they have pick up the dry cleaning and get gas in the same trip to town.

Most busy people keep lists. At the start of the day, you just jot down everything you need to accomplish. If it's a lot, you can trim the list by assigning importance to each item, and putting all the lesser stuff on the back burner. (So you only pick up the dry cleaning when you've run out of clothes to wear, but you're caught up on calls to clients.)

If you keep lists -- and you should -- collect a batch of them for a month or so.

At the end of each day, mark each list with a star if you had a good day, and never felt overwhelmed. If you had a bad day and did feel overwhelmed, mark that list with a sad face.

Once you have a pile of these lists, sit down and take a good look at them.

This is where "The Laundry List Theory" comes in.

I'll bet that, after you collect all those daily lists, you find that there are a certain number of items on each of the lists that have stars. Could be twelve, or twenty-five, or six items.

And, I'll also bet that the sad face lists have at least *one more* item on them. Thirteen, or sixteen, or seven, or whatever.

It was a bad day, because you overloaded your system. And all it took was *one* extra item.

I've seen this too many times to shrug it off. I can handle a lot of things going on at once. But, at a certain point, I just suddenly feel overwhelmed.

Other businessmen I talk with report the same feeling. A very busy day can be fun and exhilarating... while the next day, while only just a wee bit more busy, is just overwhelming.

While it's easy to understand that having "too much to do" can bring on feeling of drowning...

... the big revelation here is this: It can take just ONE added item to your list to throw your entire system out of whack.

The solution: When you feel overwhelmed, you can often "unplug" that feeling just by knocking a single item off your list. It can quickly bring your "Laundry List" back to the level where you feel comfortable and effective.

And you won't be overwhelmed anymore.

So go pick up the damn dry cleaning. When you get back to the office, things may seem much rosier than when you left.

Coaches Corner

Hey, it's getting late here. Finishing up this chapter is my current task to knock my own Laundry List down to size.

So let's wind up with a cool little Bidniz Lesson that -- cue up the theme music -- is both astonishingly simple, yet complex.

Here it is: **People are wacky.**

That's it. That's the lesson. People are wacky. You may not have noticed before.

This simple realization, however, has *profound* repercussions for your business life.

You know the old joke about the firefighter jumping into the freezing river to save a kid who fell in? He's sitting back on the shore afterwards, shivering inside a blanket, when the mother of the child walks up. She asks him, "Are you the fireman who jumped into the icy river, grabbed little Seymour, and brought him back?"

"Yes, ma'am, I am."

"Well," she continues, looking pissed off. "Where are his mittens?"

Now, that's a funny joke... but it illustrates a much deeper lesson about human behavior.

For example... is there *any* question in your mind that this scene could have actually happened? Of course it could have.

Because people are wacky. If you go through life -- and especially if you go through your business life -- not understanding this fact, you will hemorrhage time, money and energy.

Look -- people, basically, are your stock and trade, no matter what your business is. And in most markets, the 80/20 rule is in effect: 80% of your problems will be caused by 20% of your customers...

... who are either insane, criminally stupid, or time wasters. (This is just an estimation, of course. In my line, it's more like 90% of the problems are caused by 10% of the customers.) The actual percentages are unimportant.

What *is* important is the realization that the root of your discontent may be much more centralized than you think.

The damage may be more extensive than you can chart, too.

I advise marketers to NEVER look at any of the “white mail” that comes in -- which includes all refunds, complaints and dumb meanderings. Any incoming correspondence that doesn't contain an order. Most of these marketers ignore my advice -- and often waste *hours* responding to a refund or complaint.

I try to have Diane, my assistant, intercept as much of the time-wasting stuff as possible... but some sneaks through. And it is ALWAYS tempting to get deeply involved.

Last month, some bozo wanted a refund on something... and sent a long letter explaining what he felt was wrong with my material. He claimed he was a 20-year veteran of advertising, knew it all (he didn't), considered my teachings too “under-stimulating” for him, yada yada yada.

There was no purpose served by me reading that letter (he wasn't required to give any explanation to get his refund) ... and, worse, as a result of reading it, I was in a bit of a lather for the rest of the day.

Time wasters get you twice -- the time you spend reading their drivel is wasted, and the time you spend *stewing* about it is wasted, too. You aren't writing new ads, you aren't finding new customers, you aren't performing Operation MoneySuck.

Instead, you're thinking up clever retorts, or (worse) actually writing a reply letter.

The advice I give myself and clients: **Just let it go.** If anyone is causing you grief, or cheating you, sic the attorneys on him and let them do their job. Don't waste a second threatening anyone, or cajoling anyone, or begging anyone to do the right thing. They won't.

Time wasters LOVE it when you get involved with them.

That's how they win -- they engage you in a vicious little dance where nothing gets done, but they get to see your bile rise. Your flustered rage is a turn-on to them.

You win by denying them that dance.

Gary Halbert, long ago, showed me a truly nasty and effective way to deal with a client who showed themselves to be a time waster. It's brilliant, and super-effective.

Here's the set-up: We had written a killer ad for this guy. Any savvy marketer would have mailed it right away and started making money with it.

Not this guy. No. He wanted to talk on the phone, endlessly discussing details and dreams and irrelevant ideas.

Questioning everything, and acting on nothing.

He insisted we “owed” him this treat (he loved to talk on the phone and avoid letting the curtain rise on any project) because he had paid our fee.

So Gary sent him his money back.

“We’re not going to work with you,” he said, simply. “Here’s your fee back. Don’t call again.”

The guy was floored. This had never happened to him before.

He assumed he held a “power” over us by paying that fee, and he felt *entitled* to waste our time.

Entitled.

He had obviously done this before. Imagine what a poor plumber has to endure with this freak -- who feels *entitled* to just talk and talk, and actually *prevent* anything useful happening.

I dunno -- maybe there are plumbers out there who don’t care if a guy wants to pay their fee and never let anything get done.

That’s not the way I work. When I write an ad, I know that’s only half the game. The rest is in the mailing or publishing of that ad, gathering sales, and counting the money.

I don’t wanna discuss it.

I wanna *mail* it.

Anyway, it was not only deeply satisfying to pull the rug out from under this jerk -- who could not believe we were actually shutting him down -- but it was also very *profitable*.

How so? Easy. By shuttling this guy out of our lives, we opened up a spot for someone else. Someone who knew the game, and wouldn’t sit on a killer ad.

So keep track of the time you spend dealing with your customers after the sale. If anyone’s name is constantly showing up... or if you get even a single long, rambling letter trying to get your dander up... or if your staff has multiple conversations that include someone’s name and the word “trouble” too often in the same sentence... think seriously about *jettisoning* that person from your life.

Even if you have to send his money back.

Consider it money well spent.

Time wasters eat up profit and your will to live. Screw ‘em. You have better things to do.

How To Join John's Exclusive Mastermind Group.

John and his longtime biz partner Stan Dahl host an exclusive ongoing mastermind group called "The Platinum Mastermind Group". The group meets 4 times a year, and maintains an online members-only email group so members can interact, help each other in-between meetings, and take full advantage of the mastermind concept (brainstorming, networking, getting critiques, floating ideas, using each other's Rolodex's, etc.).

This group is the flagship group in John's world. He keeps it small, so everyone gets detailed, intense attention during each meeting. It's not your usual mastermind, either – rather, every member gets a Hot Seat total-focus hour centered on your chosen subject or subjects (which can be anything you feel you need to get group input or advice on... from reviewing new marketing programs, to creating new products, to entering new markets or starting a new biz entirely... and even how to better combine work and private life successfully).

This is a brilliant way to get confidential access to some of the savviest business minds around, plus have a group of entrepreneurs who share your worldview be there to watch your back, help fix problems, and enlarge your network dramatically.

To get more information, email John's personal assistant Diane at consult@john-carlton.com

Chapter Ten:

Acts Of Conscious Courage...

A shuddering trip into the basement of your psyche, where Greed Demons work tirelessly to burn you out.

In one of my more popular issues of the notorious “Rant” newsletter, I tried to make three pretty basic and simple points:

1. We all are infested with tiny little squealing demons whose job is to screw up your life. *Your* job, if you want to get hip to the good times awaiting anyone who bothers to wake up, is to quickly and efficiently shuttle as many demons out of your system as possible.

2. There are two kinds of greed. The first comes with a demon, and represents raw ape-brain desire. Me want. Me take. The second kind is more enlightened...

... and utterly necessary if you want to attain the freedom to do good things.

3. Getting rid of your demons, and finally putting greed in its place in your life, require acts of courage and effort... but will put your train on the fast track once you accomplish the task.

However... if you get lazy, the demons will sneak back in, and the bad kind of greed will turn you once again into a sleep-walking zombie.

And that’s pretty much the story to this point.

Your demons may be entirely different than mine. Alcoholism, for example, is a particularly virulent demon. The fear of people wearing beards is a demon. (It’s called pogonophobia.) A restless need to seek approval from your ne’er-do-well (and long gone) father is a demon.

The list is long. See the entire library of fiction and plays (whose plots all revolve around the foibles and demons of human interaction), plus the history of crime and success for a more comprehensive indexing.

Nevertheless, you have a choice as a human being: You can live your life like everyone else, numb and snoozing and oblivious to the feast... or you can undertake the struggle to *wake yourself up*, and grab a seat at the table.

Most folks choose to snore away their time here on earth. Not that there’s anything wrong with that.

But if you choose to pursue real success (the kind not measured by the size of your bank account), and taste a little bit of the wondrous delights the universe has laid out...

... then you *cannot* be content to remain half-asleep.

It's a Pandora's Box, of course. To wake up, you'll have to face your demons... which requires a very intimidating trek into the basement of your psyche.

You'll have to slip the knots of all habits and narcotic pleasures that keep you locked in the dream world of modern life. (And please don't accuse me of ripping off *The Matrix* here -- that movie was *just* okay, and the sequels simply sucked wind. The concept was better explored by William Gibson before Hollywood got around to it, and a thousand other philosophers -- including Rod Serling, God bless him -- before that. Don't be so confined inside our culture that you refuse to feel and understand the long connection we all have with our *ancestors*... who looked just as hard for enlightenment as you are now.)

Waking up means cutting back -- and, just to show you have the power to do it, often even *eliminating* entirely -- on your couch potato sessions, Xbox marathons, and obsess-on-every-sport-as-if-it-meant-anything habits.

I do not mention these joneses lightly -- I love wee-hour channel surfing until my eyes cross, once got fairly good at Doom and several car chase video games, and at times have religiously followed pro baseball, hockey, roundball and the gridiron.

Whew.

I still cruise the late-night dial, still dabble at games, still catch the final round of important events... but never obsessively and only when doing so is simply a choice I desire.

Nowadays, I'm still connected to the culture... just not at the hip.

I go outside a lot more.

It matters. Waking up means not using the boob tube as your window to the world... and actually taking the time to watch clouds for an afternoon... or listen to birds and breezes instead of your iPod... or just sit with someone on the porch and not say a word, instead of being a bobble-head ADD distraction junkie.

It means getting *calm*. And paying attention to what's going on inside your big, over-capacity mind...

... and taking care of business.

When you're asleep, your entire system of senses and memory and thinking gets all fouled up. Your garden needs tending. You may look all sharp and with-it and cool and blinged-out... but there's no light in your eyes.

If you even vaguely suspect you're clogged up...

... then you are.

It's almost a given. We aren't taught to wake up, because we're raised by zombies who have probably never tasted a fully-awake moment in their life. (Count your blessings if you even brushed up against someone, at any point in your development, who gave you a glimpse of the possibilities of the Feast set up just outside the limits of your clouded vision. That's more than most people get.)

However, this ongoing Rant is about me, not you. I offer myself up as an example of how horribly wrong it can go.

I painfully must relearn my lessons over and over again.

Maybe, by getting an inside view of what happened to me, you can avoid having to go through the same trauma and bullshit I've been slogging through for the past few months.

Here's the continuation of the story: Years ago, through intense navel-gazing, meditation and the relentless staring-down of each and every demon I found hiding in my head... I woke up.

I'd been struggling my entire life up to that point. What kept me going was the very vague and unsubstantiated rumor that it was possible.

That's all I had to go on. So, my adventure in waking up was long and jarring.

Much of the truth about life came to me from being involved in direct response advertising, oddly enough. You can't live in a dreamworld and be a good adman -- you must face reality, and let the results tell you what's what.

Belief systems based on fantasy disintegrate when compared to what *works* when you attempt to sell something to someone.

Admen deal with people as they *are*, not as we'd like them to be.

Thus -- I saw the power of raw greed up close and personal.

And, after years of dealing with it, I decided NOT to get cynical about it. (Many other admen do get cynical -- the realization that most folks are just grubby little greed-heads can harden your heart.)

Instead... I decided to just let greed be greed... and to find out if there was more to the story.

And there is, as I've already said. The "I gotta get mine before you get yours" kind of greed is what drives much of world events and inter-personal behavior. It can be nasty, and it can cause all sorts of problems.

Like, oh let me think... war and crime and intimidation politics.

Nasty.

However, there's another side of greed that is totally controllable... and even necessary for getting things done.

It's not "I gotta get mine first"... but, rather, "I will *establish* myself first, so I can help you later."

It sounds like a justification for being selfish... but it's actually the way things get done.

The best teachers are those who have already carved out their place in the world. They have no incentive to hold back, because they do not fear the student's success.

Rather, they revel in any success they can encourage and help bring to fruition. (Gary Halbert was the first teacher I ever met with this quality. For all the ways we are different, we've remained close friends years after my mentorship with him because there is no jealousy or envy between us. He never held back teaching me, and that style fit me perfectly when I finally took up the teacher mantle. Not holding back means you can just be yourself at all times, and I'm not clever enough to act out a role. I can only do the teaching I do because I allow myself to let go.)

You simply cannot attain this state of pure sharing... until you've established yourself. That means you must be selfish enough to get the job done.

You gotta obsess on yourself, and your own goals. Until you attain what you're after.

Hopefully, once you attain success, you will channel some of your energy back into the world in a positive way.

That feels better than anything you can imagine right now. It's a unique feeling.

However... too many people get addicted to greed, and never see the possibilities for good. They stay in that selfish mode long after they've earned their fortune... and continue to push and drive and maintain their position as The Man.

Because that's all they know.

That's the bad kind of greed. That's evidence of a sick need deep inside, nurtured by hidden demons.

Or, in my case... by demons who snuck back in, uninvited.

A bare six months ago, I was on cruise control with my life. I had things right where I had worked so hard to get them -- lots of free time to play, lots of unfettered "big thought" exploration, lots of serious work that kept me fulfilled and energized.

I woke up every day, eager to get back after it. And I had so much time off, I was rested and fit and

brimming with piss and vinegar.

Just like a man should be.

And then I noticed something that created a little discomfort deep inside.

I should have known it was a demon returning. A greed-demon, too -- the worst kind.

What I noticed, while attending some seminars and doing some joint ventures with people... was that a whole army of people were taking my advice... and earning fortunes with it.

Normally, I am overjoyed to hear this. I'm doing just fine financially, thank you very much. In fact, I'm embarrassed by my good fortune -- humbled, really, by the rewards from work I actually enjoy.

I wasn't raised in a community that understood the concept of "liking what you do". Most of my peers became workplace fodder, slaving away to make someone else rich.

The idea that what you did for a living could also make you happy was not even on the radar.

I've been steadily counting my blessings since the day I first went solo as a freelancer.

So... what was this strange jealousy in my heart over the tremendous good fortune of some people I'd helped?

I'm telling you honestly -- I should have recognized what was happening.

It was an unwelcome stirring of greed that bode me ill.

If I'd only done a little remedial soul-searching, everything would have come out fine.

But I succumbed. I decided to drift back asleep... and let greed take over.

Because, you know, it wasn't "right" that people were getting so filthy rich using MY advice like that.

This admission pains me, because I don't like the person I became for a short time there this past summer.

I didn't kill anybody, or even insult anyone. I still tended to my teaching, still never held anything back, still believed I was on the "right" track to reach my goals.

But I was *asleep* again.

I was, unconsciously, bound and determined to screw up my life as thoroughly as possible.

What I did may seem innocent... but it ruined everything I held dear.

I'm just damned lucky I survived.

Here's what happened: First, you probably know that I rarely take on new clients. I get lots of offers, and I'm always polite... but I just don't have the time.

I've got a lot of books -- business-related, and fiction -- I want to write, plus seminars to give and a few pet projects to get moving on.

All my hard work to this point was supposed to have kept my summer clear to write and think and cruise. That was the plan.

But no. Greed set in.

And I took on a raft of new clients. They all waved huge checks at me, and I responded like a bull to a red cape.

Snort.

I'm not ragging on the clients. They're innocent. I actually become friends with many clients, because we get to know each other so well during the research phases.

However, the whole point of working with clients over the past twenty years... has been to sock away enough cash to be able to teach and write what I want to write. For myself.

Here's how I describe taking on a new client's project. (It's a metaphor, so don't get hung up on the imagery, okay?)

Here's the scene: A client comes to me and says, "John, we know there's a pearl at the bottom of that 5,000 gallon tank. It's worth a fortune... but we don't know how to get to it... because the tank is filled with raw sewage. Do you know how to get down there and snag the pearl?"

And I sigh. Yes, I know how to do it.

So I get my support crew together, crawl into my diving suit, and descend into the muck. It's not rocket science, but rookies either freak out or make mistakes that screw everything up... so you need a guy like me, who knows how to do this.

I get to the bottom, feel around, find the pearl... and slog my way back up.

"Gee, thanks," says the client. "Now, over there we have another pearl we can't get to. It's in a 10,000-gallon vat of sewage. Can you go get that pearl, too? We appreciate it."

The metaphor of raw sewage is apt -- many clients come to me with such confused, obtuse and unworkable ideas... that finding a way to make it all work really is like being immersed in muck.

The client isn't a bad guy, necessarily.

He's just the reason I'm crawling into the mire.

Look -- after all my years as a front-line copywriter, it's easy for me to figure out what needs to be done to make almost *any* marketing paradigm work like crazy.

But it takes time.

More specifically... it takes HEAD time. From my head, and my brain.

To write good stuff, I have to get completely hip to every aspect of the project. That takes time, energy and life-force.

I know I'm on the right path when I start dreaming about the project.

I know I'm close to a brilliant solution to a problem when I find myself working like a mad scientist until four a.m., and forget what day it is (or what else I have to do).

This is all great for the client.

But it can make a mess of *my* life.

Don't get me wrong. Freelance copywriting has been very, very good to me. For most of my career, going deep with clients was fun and enlightening and energizing.

I enjoyed flying across the country to take care of projects. I thrived meeting deadlines and losing myself in jobs.

And I really enjoyed cashing those humongous checks.

However, after twenty years, I was starting to become less enamored of those towering vats of metaphorical sewage.

I had other things I wanted to accomplish, and I thought I was well on the path to getting them done.

Until I got swept away with greed again.

Here's what happened as a result: By agreeing to take on several new clients... I immediately surrendered ALL the free time I'd reserved for the summer.

I would need every spare minute for research, interviews and writing for someone else. I also immediately was forced to put all my personal projects on a back burner.

So... no fun time. No book writing. And no relaxed "stare at the clouds" time for thinking any Big Thoughts.

In short... I put my life into a banker's box, and stashed it on a shelf.

Summer, gone.

And I don't have that many summers left.

It gets worse. By mid-June, I began to dread going into my home office. It wasn't fun anymore -- it was *work*.

I also found myself getting a little annoyed about all the critiques and consulting I needed to do. This REALLY frosts my ass... because normally, I LOVE to critique people's writing.

This is why I became a teacher.

This is where I know I can really make a difference in people's lives, and lure them into a whole new world of business success and personal competence.

So what the hell was this *annoyance* shit?

It was the first stage of *burn out*, is what it was.

I have burned out once before, and it's not pretty. It's the most common and most rightly feared bug in a writer's life. We get overwhelmed, and our brains get herky-jerky. The juice gets low, the gears grind, and you suddenly can't find the Zone anymore.

To write well, you must be energized, well-lubed and loose.

When you burn out, you fry all the important parts of your system.

And then you're done.

When I burned out in early 1991, I took off most of the next three years. Just left advertising almost entirely, and did other things.

Fortunately, I was able to afford doing this sabbatical right... and I eventually returned, fresh and eager again.

But I was one of the lucky ones.

The irony of this past summer was not just that I -- the veteran teacher -- was committing a rookie mistake and risking burn out...

... but also that, by taking those humongous checks to write for new clients, I was GUTTING the essence of the business I actually love.

While crafting ads and letters for all these clients... I did not write a new course or book for my

teaching projects. I did not build or nurture my list of prospects. I did not put on a seminar, or write a novel, or play a lot of golf or go sit on the beach up at Tahoe and watch the waves lap the shore.

I wrote for clients.

Every day.

By succumbing to greed, I actually put severe *limits* on my potential income.

And nearly sucked my enjoyment of life dry.

It was a very, very bad thing.

And here's how I put everything back on the right track: First, I help up my end of the bargains. I met every deadline, and finished up all my commitments to the clients.

Second... I again started turning down all offers.

Third... and most important... *I sought out help*. I sat in my office one day, feeling my brain shrivel and jerk, and asked the universe for a little guidance.

And -- as has so often happened in the past -- the answer dropped into my lap. My good friend Joe Polish emailed, asking me to join him and a few others for a brainstorm at his Phoenix office.

I've told you about Joe before. His office is Action Central for the entrepreneurial marketing world, and he relentlessly pursues and wins over top experts and authors and business owners... bring them into the biggest and most influential party I know about.

When Joe holds a brainstorm, I do everything I can to attend. Because I NEVER leave without major flashes of inspiration and hard-core marketing insights.

You know the concept of brainstorm groups, right? The first coherent mention of them for business was by Napoleon Hill in "Think And Grow Rich"... but the idea goes back to the first team meeting of tribal leaders back in the jungle.

It's very simple: Put the best minds you can find together in a room... and discuss things without censorship or limitations.

Normally, I'm one of the "solvers" at the table -- I enjoy identifying and fixing problems and finding elegant solutions to complex situations.

But this time... I decided it was time to take advantage of the intellectual firepower in that room. The group Joe had assembled included some of the most clever, savvy and happy businessmen I've ever known.

And so, without hesitation, I offered myself up for a Hot Seat dissection.

I explained my problem in basic terms -- I'd screwed up my life, was overwhelmed and burning out, and needed help getting back on track.

Fast.

What happened over the next hour was life changing. I had revelation after revelation... all of it immediately useable, and all of it proven and tested and recommended.

Let me share the particulars with you:

First Revelation: There were over a dozen hand-picked people at the brainstorm, but only a few really zeroed in on my situation. One was Craig Forte, a brilliant marketer I've known for years. (I wrote the first edition of "Kick-Ass Copywriting Secrets" expressly for one of his seminars I spoke at, in fact.)

Craig immediately recognized what I was going through. He'd experienced the same symptoms many times himself... and he'd done radical business surgery to remedy them.

Basically, he woke up one day realizing he had lost the fun and eagerness for his business. And it was all because of *one* particular project... one that was bringing in a filthy fortune, too.

It was a project that absolutely made sense for him to do -- his competition was deep into similar things, it seemed like a natural money-maker, and any consultant out there would tell you it was the logical and right thing to do.

But it was ripping the will to live from Craig's heart. He knew himself, and knew his idiosyncracies.

This project -- it was a coaching program -- would have fit a lot of other businessmen's personalities like a glove, and gone well. For Craig, it was a hair shirt.

And so he dropped it.

Listen carefully: This project was a success. Craig almost asked me not to mention this, because other marketers might think he's a certified nut... but I insisted, because it's such a central part of the lesson.

The money coming in was irrelevant.

It was sapping his strength. The cash was a pair of handcuffs, chaining him to commitments that drained energy and left him with a fatter bank account but less enthusiasm.

So he dropped the project. An act of conscious courage.

Could *you* jettison a seven-figure job, even if you realized it was stealing your life?

Most people can't even conceive of the notion. Success is measured by incoming moolah, isn't it? You'd have to be an idiot to turn your back on wealth, no matter what the price.

Wrong answer.

Truly successful people never use their bank account as a measuring stick. There are other things more important.

Much, much more important.

Second Revelation: Craig also mentioned something that hit a nerve with me -- in his long experience with real success, he realized that he was happiest when dealing with just two or three projects.

This was immediately echoed by Richard Rossi, another ridiculously successful businessman from the east coast. Richard has earned a fortune helping kids realize their dreams, and he's kept a close eye on his own progress.

He actually kept his project list to one or two things at a time.

This is seriously important stuff here.

Richard shared some tough love with me -- words he'd had to swallow himself years earlier, while still struggling to find his place in the world.

Basically... he told me to grow up. It's immature to believe you can "have it all", or increase your happiness and success by spreading yourself thin, trying to be all things to all people at all times.

He wasn't referring to growing up physically, or even emotionally. He was referring to the very difficult act of establishing yourself in the world. Our early dreams of success are often scattered and unrealistic... and need to be trimmed down to what can actually *happen*.

Especially if being happy while you succeed is as important to you as it is to me.

Third Revelation: Joe, at that point, sheepishly admitted that his "job chart" was filled with about fifty more projects than he could ever get to.

I looked at his chart, leaning against the far wall, in horror. I'd done the same thing myself, back in my office. Put up a bulletin board, and crammed 3x5 cards on it, each representing a new "opportunity" I simply had to eventually take advantage of... as soon as I had the time.

Looking at those cards with a sober reality, I instantly realized there was no way in hell I could ever

do a fraction of them, no matter how hard I worked at it.

More important... there was no way I wouldn't be guaranteeing another bout of burn out if I even tried.

There was more irony: To put that bulletin board up in my office -- which I'd done right about the time the greed demon weaseled his way back into my head -- I had to take down a little sign I'd had up for years, which read:

No Tail, Shithead.

I'm the shithead, by the way. That note was a reminder to me NOT to take on projects that went on and on and on, so that I was nailed to the office to fulfill commitments.

A "tail" is a commitment you have in the future. No matter what you do today, no matter how brilliantly you handle the project right now...

... there will be another vat of sewage waiting for you down the road.

And I took that note DOWN to accommodate a job chart that wanted to kill me.

Joe and I looked at each other and shuddered.

Fourth Revelation: David Cross is a senior Internet consultant with Agora -- one of the architects of their jaw-dropping success, zooming from nascent Web activity to leader of the pack in one year.

This may have been his first brainstorm -- certainly he'd never met wacko's like me before, and seemed a bit taken aback by my willingness to be vulnerable and seek advice.

He soon caught on, though... and shared something that has repercussions far beyond my sordid little story.

What David urged Agora to do is *systematize* their assault on the Web, rather than continually skirmishing at the edges. They were squandering their firepower, acting like a bunch of little tribes...

... instead of coalescing into a single staggering empire that efficiently and effectively absorbs, processes and pleases prospects.

Specifically, he convinced them to *measure the right things*. Not the obvious stuff, but the things affecting the ephemeral bottom line.

For example: Some of the hottest online lists also have the highest spam counts. If all you measured was filtered-out email, you'd miss that simple fact. And lose millions in potential sales.

Wow. As big as they are, they still need to pay attention to the *system*. And keep it simple and

efficient and smart.

For guys like me – one-man bands (with a single overworked assistant) -- it sometimes seems a challenge to systematize things.

It's just so easy to let standard operating procedure trudge along with whatever slapped-together processes we used at the very beginning.

It's a hidden way the daily joy becomes a daily chore. The work becomes a job.

Alex Mandossian – another long-time trusted online colleague of mine -- nailed the point down: He has gotten so good at managing his time, he never comes home from a trip (and he travels often) to face a stack of waiting email, mail, and “urgent” calls to return.

How does he arrange this?

Simple. He understands how important his time is... and clearly lets people know when he's available, and when he's not.

His recorded phone messages are elegant “please respect my time” announcements that deflect time-wasters and yet automatically move truly important messages up the ladder.

Fifth Revelation: We'll finish with this note: As Richard rudely put it, I've got around 10,000 days left (assuming I live to a ripe old age)...

... so there's no time to waste.

We all come with an expiration date, which is unknown to us. Steve Jobs, after his famous bout with cancer, wrote this note that stays above his desk always: “If today were the last day of my life, would I do what am about to do?”

You may have to take some time off to gel on all this. And put together a definite PLAN on how to get your mojo back.

For me, it's about not squandering time anymore. Demons, shown the door. I know what makes me happy, and taking these things for granted is a no-no.

Alex stressed this: You are NOT “wasting time” by refusing to act when you know you're not ready.

Early in my career, I went by the “Ready, *Fire*, Aim” ethos -- because acting (fire) was critical to moving ahead.

But that was only operative during the early years, when the biggest obstacle to success was simply moving my ass and jumping in the pool. I often give this same advice to rookies who need a kick-start to get moving.

Once I found the niche that fit me, however, it was time to return to “Ready, *Aim*, Fire.”

And NOT act until I have everything in place. The right people, committed to the right goal, in the right positions.

Figure it out, set it up, and keep it simple.

I feel like a two-ton weight has been lifted from my back. And I ain't never crawling back into another vat of sewage again.

Get More Carlton At The Blog...

If you're enjoying this book, and still have a jones for more...

... make sure you pop over to John's infamous blog at <http://www.john-carlton.com>, and sign in for email alerts on new posts. (There's a library's worth of archives on the site, too.)

The sign-in box is top right. Make sure you do this first, because you don't wanna miss what's coming up...

Chapter Eleven:

Boy Eats Own Head...

Dangerous headline tactics, diving into the red-hot core of popular culture, why the secret lives of your friends can give you nightmares, and the incongruous juxtaposition of diverse compelling sales elements.

What up, dog?

Let's talk about writing headlines -- the most important part of your copy. But let's get to it through a side door.

A very secret, semi-sleazy side door that gets used a lot, despite most decent folks not wanting to admit even *knowing* about it.

First stop: The number one rated television spectacle this season.

I scheduled in a couple of hour's worth of "American Idol" last week, just to keep my hand in the popular culture. It continues to provide serious buzz around the water cooler, even after multiple seasons.

I've only caught glimpses of the previous shows during the actual "competition" phase -- I couldn't care less who wins -- but I am *riveted* to the tube during the early contestant-finding segments, when it should be called "American Freak Show".

It's cruel theater, because the producers set up obviously brain-damaged (and karaoke-challenged) people to go in front of the cameras and humiliate themselves.

However, this is nothing new, even for so-called advanced civilizations. Rome ruled several continents two millennia ago by keeping the rabble sedated with bread and circus.

And while there's no actual blood-letting on most of the current reality TV shows (the brutal "Fear Factor" notwithstanding), high ratings often only come when human sheep are thrown to the wolves.

The public howls for emotional gore, and gets it. By the bucket. Our gladiator circuit is alive and well, and you can gorge on the fun without leaving your couch.

God help us all.

I don't get too riled up about it. It is what it is, and all the hand-wringing in the world won't change anything. The human race skews to the wacky, and takes sadistic glee in the misfortune of others (*Schadenfreude* is the fifty-cent word).

Nevertheless, one of your main jobs (if you aspire to marketing greatness) is to stay wired into the red-hot core of popular culture.

Every sordid, dank, foul-smelling corner of it.

To get really world-class, you can't even hold your nose while you fondle the trash. You don't necessarily have to enjoy it, but you're not allowed to feel *superior*, either.

This isn't about the occasionally slumming to see how the other half lives. It's about understanding human behavior -- including your own.

Remember, you share DNA with even the dumbest, skankiest and most embarrassing person out there. We is them, and they is us. Future generations are gonna look down on you for wearing leather, eating chemical-garbage, and having hair on your toes.

We're not all that special.

Even the most sophisticated among us can become fodder for the comedian circuit as tastes change and what is hip and allowed today becomes criminally wrong tomorrow.

History is one big, ongoing lesson that most people ignore.

I like to haunt antique stores and buy old magazines, especially from "on the cusp" periods of history... like just before wars, or elections, or big sloppy cultural shifts.

And one of the great cautionary tales of our times involves Frank Sinatra... who, in the early sixties, was riding at the top of his fame. His Rat Pack lifestyle was considered the *epitome* of hip.

You wanted to know what was cool, you asked Frank.

And then the Beatles landed, and he was completely blind-sided. Simply could not believe the entire culture wasn't as appalled as he was with this 180-degree turn in defining cool.

Frank held onto his fame, but not his coveted throne of hipness. In fact, for a very long time he became mocked as the *opposite* of hip.

Now, I like Frank... especially his "classic" nightclub period... and I've got "Fly Me To The Moon" on CDs right next to "She Loves You, Yeah, Yeah, Yeah". (Not as jarring a segue as you might think.)

But there's a great lesson to be gleaned from his career arc.

The culture didn't just change -- it *split*. And the consequences of choosing sides shows how important it is to step back and try to get a clearer picture of what's at stake.

In college, we had a slightly older friend who hung around the edges of our crowd, trolling for girls. He was a joke among the guys, because his seduction routine included stealthily slipping on Sinatra and Harry Belafonte records in his bachelor pad while mixing martinis.

The rock and rollers among us were in stitches hearing about this incredibly un-hip, ten-years-out-of-date playboy act... but guess what?

Sometimes, it worked.

Our derisive laughter turned to amazement. In our zeal for coolness, we completely ignored the possibility that a segment of our age group stubbornly *stayed* square.

Back then, it was just an unfathomable concept to my still-forming mind.

Nowadays, after decades of deciphering and dealing with the vagaries of human behavior, I'm glad for that early glimpse of variation.

Not understanding how people work forces you to cling to belief systems that -- most of the time -- are just dead wrong.

At first, it can be disconcerting to peek into the secret lives of your fellow humans. It all seems so... chaotic and immeasurable.

It's not.

As any good salesman can tell you, there are just a bunch of different (and *identifiable*) categories of behavior that people fall into. Once you open yourself to a tolerant worldview, it even begins to make sense.

I rely on a calm neo-Zen state to survive the occasional shocks of reality. When you first strip away your protective belief systems, you can feel pretty naked for a while.

Yet, there's real tranquility in just observing without judgment, and allowing the universe work its mojo without wishing things were different.

Get over it. And get with it.

As a copywriter, you need to develop the ability to toss The National Enquirer and Weekly World Globe into your shopping basket without blushing... to sit calmly through the occasional Oprah estrogen bath... to read brain-gagging popular novels... to care about Brad and Jen (just for a second, though)... and to immerse yourself in Joe Sixpack's and Susie Homemaker's worlds of fluff and inconsequential inanity.

All without pretending this isn't the *core reality* of the world you're trying to sell stuff in.

C'mon. You don't want to be like those clueless GM suits in Detroit, never bothering to walk the plant floor for fear of getting specks of dust on your \$900 Gucci loafers.

You know -- the guys who *still* don't know why the Japanese are cleaning their clocks in the automobile market, and who just suffered the indignity of having their stock reduced to "junk" status.

And you don't want to end up like the morons at Sony who wasted a decade trying to build a virtual fortress around their precious music sales division... while Apple went with the flow and invented iTunes (a buck a song!) and the iPod. (Hard to imagine a world without Sony, but it could happen if they don't get their collective head out of their butt.)

The "flow" (or *Zeitgeist*, as we obnoxious verbal elites like to call it) is all online right now, but reflected in television and the print media. The essence of this flow is change.

Constant, unrelenting *change*.

Information you gather this morning on Google Adwords can be obsolete by lunchtime. (It happened last month, in fact, with no warning.)

Buy the most advanced cell-phone/wireless-Web-access/music-video-game-playing/planner-address-book thingamajig you can find... and it'll be old news by the end of the next quarter. (Which just happened when, with little warning, the video iPod replaced the "just music" iPod.)

You know the drill. More raw information is available with EACH issue of the online New York Times (with all the archives) than has been published since the dawn of civilization.

For free.

And that's just the Times. The Washington Post repeats the feat, with different archives... as does the Los Angeles Times, the Chicago Tribune, the Seattle Post-Intelligencer, and on and on.

Info overload is here to stay (at least until the lights go off).

For some people, this is *heaven*. Anything you want to know about anything is at your fingertips. Eight different kinds of technology to choose from in a new television set. GPS in the car, right next to your hands-free phone and Sirius radio (forty thousand channel options, plus Howard Stern!) (*and* you can get free pirated shows of ol' Howard, if you know where to look on the Internet).

An email from your long-lost grade school sweetheart is suddenly simmering in your inbox. (She tracked you down through Facebook.)

Your grandfather has a blog about his rheumatism. (With enough hits to rank astonishingly high on alexa.com.)

This morning's newspaper headline seems even older than it is, because you read the entire story on

drudgereport.com, it seems, last week (though it was only last night).

And... okay, I'll stop. Just making a point with some fun writing.

I'm sure I didn't tell you anything, just now, you didn't already know.

But I felt like writing a few blurbs anyway. Were this a sales letter, rather than a newsletter, I would likely edit those "fun" paragraphs out and get to whatever sales point I was trying to make faster.

But I still would have written them in the first draft.

For fun.

Because fun, for me, is the *key* to enjoying my job. When I talk to Gary Halbert, or Dan Kennedy, or any of the other "insiders" I know in this business, the conversation is loaded with stories of trials and tribulations that would crush our souls if we couldn't *laugh* about it.

Life is cruel and unfair, and so what. Roll with the punches, learn your lessons, keep moving.

It's the learning part that keeps you progressing.

It's the *fun* part that keeps you sane.

That's why I'm urging you to stay wired into the culture... and to have fun doing it.

Don't think of it as part of your job. Instead, think of it as part of the fun of *having* a job where you get to observe the world in all its most weird and fascinating foibles... and the more you observe, the more you'll earn.

It's important.

Right up through young adulthood, most of my understanding of human behavior came from my immediate peer group. It was stunted input. (For example, I often ask fellow Boomers what percentage of our generation they think took any college classes at all. The ones who went to college usually guess 50%. Real answer: 15%. College-educated people tend to hang with their own, and it *skews* your perception of reality. That's not good.)

Learning how to become a killer salesman will make you a better person. Because the **ONLY** way to hone your chops is to become a student of human nature... and that requires removing the stars from your eyes.

And while there *are* some noble aspects of our nature, most of our behavior is pretty damned squirrely. And kept carefully under wraps.

The secret lives of your friends and colleagues would give you nightmares.

If having fun with it bothers you -- because, my God, people are *starving* in the Third World -- then either bump your donations to charity or roll up your sleeves and volunteer for something. Personally, I give a wad of cash to the local Food Bank, and divvy up another chunk between major charities. I have to hold my breath sometimes, because even the damn Red Cross dabbles in corruption.

But I do it.

And while I may volunteer more in the future... I'm still recovering from my two years working with institutionalized kids in my first "real world" job thirty years ago (My job title was "crisis intervention counselor", but mostly I just tried to keep the daily chaos under some semblance of control. What constituted a true "crisis" in a normal family was just an everyday occurrence in the institution. The stuff I had to deal with involved open wounds, restraining orders and serious psychological breakdowns.)

It can give you a warm feeling writing a check you believe will help someone.

It's another thing altogether to crawl into the front-line trenches and breathe the same air as the people you believe need your help. (My heart went out to the kids I worked with... except for the times the little darlings were vandalizing my truck, stealing from the neighbors, or poisoning dinner.)

My point is this: Neither an airy-fairy fantasy about our collective behavior, nor a cynical dismissal of the Jerry Springer rabble, will get it done for the marketer who wants to win big.

It's ALL part of the reality mix.

I've hung with high-powered CEOs, and entrepreneurs earning millions... and while both may present an "adult" face for the public, in *private* they're all like poorly-disciplined kids at recess.

Brain surgeons tell fart jokes, rocket scientists sneak off to strip clubs, and pillars of the community secretly dream of being an irresponsible rock star.

My first golf ads (about one-legged golfers and old crippled guys who humiliate PGA pros) shocked and disturbed the market. Other advertisers snickered, *certain* that such long, ballsy and in-your-face copy would bomb.

When, instead, those ads generated fortunes and huge lists of older, creaky golfers who felt overlooked by the sport's obsession with fit young bucks with windmill swings... well, the other advertisers simply *ignored* the results.

Didn't fit their belief system.

It's the same with almost every other market I've written for (and that includes just about every niche you can name).

I don't take a client's word when he describes his target audience... because he really, *really* wants to believe his customers are different.

All he cares to know about is the responsible "grown-up" face of his market -- the protective social gear worn to disguise the weirdness.

Me? I want to see what the prospect is like when he's let his guard down. Among friends. Or dreaming (when his deepest fears and most childish desires bubble up).

Especially dreaming.

As a young freelancer, I had to develop an "inner advice columnist" to help me with each new client. After getting burned or misled a few times, I learned to rely on this inner intuition more and more.

And it wasn't all that complex.

For example: Most of the time, when someone tells you "money is no problem"...

... money *is* a big problem.

Most of the time, when someone tells you "I never interfere with professionals doing their job"...

... that's actually their primary reason for coming to work.

And most of the time, when someone tells you "I don't [fill in the blank -- drink, gamble, fool around]"...

... chances are they're gonna do *exactly* that as soon as they get out of your sight.

What's all this got to do with headlines?

Plenty.

Once you bring the full force of your understanding of human behavior to your headline writing, your results start to go off the chart.

First, though, let's cover the more mundane aspects of good headlines. I find myself having to often re-explain these basics when critiquing ads, despite the fact I cover it all quite thoroughly in "Kick-Ass Copywriting Secrets Of A Marketing Rebel".

Whatever. Let's go over it again.

Most books on copywriting cover headlines, and I encourage you to read them all for tips.

Don't buy it all as the final word, though -- it's just a starting point.

As a rookie, I had John Caples' "*Tested Advertising Methods*" and Vic Schwab's "*How To Write A Good Ad*" right next to my desk for quick reference. But only until I internalized the basics.

Headlines really break down into a few basic categories, and while you can fill pages up with examples, you can engorge your Bag of Tricks with the *fundamental* stuff pretty quickly.

There are "benefit-oriented" heads that rope you in offering valuable info...

"How To Beat The Stock Market"

"Whiter Teeth In One Week"

"How A Desperate Nerd Became A Sex God"

... including negative spins...

"7 Mistakes Clueless Women Make That Ruin Their Marriage"

"How To Avoid Jail Time If You Cheat On Your Taxes"

... and the classic "take away"...

"Why Almost Everyone Is Wrong About What It Takes To Pack On Serious Muscle"

... and the curiosity headline...

"Who Else Wants To Win At Poker?"

There are other categories, but these are the basics. It's what I *start* with...

... before I apply my "Super Secret Headline Strengthening" secrets.

First, though, more education. Secrets later.

Here are the juicy parts of a classic headline test from another John Caples' book ("*How To Make Your Advertising Make Money*") -- not the full quiz, just the bad and good versions of each headline. Check these gems out:

"If you are a careful driver, you can save money on car insurance" beat "How to turn your careful driving into money". Straight, factual statement concisely worded wins against a head that flirts with confusion.

“How to get your cooking bragged about” knocked off “How to make your food taste better”. Ol’ John had his own beliefs about why the first one worked so much better... but for me, it’s clear that the Power Phrase *“bragged about”* did the trick.

“How to build an attic room” *tripled* the response of “How to build your own darkroom”. Bigger market segment.

“How to do your Christmas shopping in 5 minutes” beat “The gift that comes 12 times a year” by 90%. Insider time-saving trick over boring cliché -- no contest.

“How to get a loan of \$500” doubled the response of “When should a family get a loan?” Broke folks don’t want a lecture, they want cash.

“Can you spot these 7 common decorating sins?” slaughtered “To every woman who would like a career in Interior Design”. The product was a mail-order course, but it was a mistake to give that detail away so early. You gotta *hook* ‘em first.

“Most important Bible news in 340 years” beat “Announcing an important revision of the Bible”. Lots of rookies are smitten with “announcing” type headlines cuz they sound so authoritarian, but they seldom work well.

The creepy **“Will your scalp stand the ‘Fingernail Test’?”** beat “Good news for men who want attractive, well-groomed hair”. Very visceral, very graphic.

Finally... **“Girls...want quick curls?”** tripled the response rate of “Does he still say ‘You’re lovely’?” Specific benefit to targeted demographic.

All of the above is just a *set up* for what I want to share with you. I love dated ads that retain their potency, but you can’t just grab any old ad and assume it will be as effective today.

This is the blunder so many non-veteran copywriting “experts” make when trying to teach the details of writing killer headlines.

Now, sometimes you don’t have to know WHY a certain ad worked. You only need to know that it *did* work... and then you figure out how to rip it so it sells *your* stuff.

The most basic headlines can be deconstructed, for example, like this: “How a [*blank*] discovered the amazing secrets of [*blank*].”

But the magic -- if there is any -- is not in the stark blueprint construction of the headline.

No. It’s in the *choice of the words* you use to fill in the blanks.

That’s why learning the concept of Power Words and Power Phrases is so critical. To complete the above example: “How a one-legged golfer discovered the amazing secrets of launching 300-yard tee

shots.”

This is where your deep research of the market, and your understanding of human behavior... combined with street-level salesmanship psychology... comes to fruition.

Let's see this in action.

I have a big damn pile of headlines on my desk culled from recent media, and I'm going to alternate between the hook-laden stuff that makes me want to read the story... and the dull crap that causes me to stifle a yawn.

Here goes. This is a great lesson in figuring out how top writers think, and bad writers bore. (My comments are in [brackets]):

New JonBenet Evidence: Santa Was Her Killer! [Good old Weekly World News.]

Palestinians Set Meeting of Parliament. [NY Times, stuffing the interesting details...]

Aliens Moon NASA Spacecraft! [Compact, startling, hooky... I mean, alien butts for cryin' out loud...]

Hitachi -- Inspire the Next. [That's the *entire* headline for the double-truck ad in the priciest real estate in Business Week. Total non-sequitur.]

How To Make Your Own Voodoo Doll... and Watch Your Troubles Disappear! [I want this info... don't you?]

Budget Reflects Competition For Money. [*ZZZZZZ*...]

Lawmakers Could Ban Coffee! [*What?!?*]

Dream meets delivery. Promise meets performance. It's time you meet the new AT&T. [Yeah? Sez who?]

Docs Put Computer Port In Man's Brain. [WTF?]

Rolex. [That's it. Stark Madison Avenue arrogance.] [Oh, wait -- 800 number and Web site in six point type at the bottom. How elegant.]

Bush's New Plan For The Homeless: Clown Cars! [Surely this isn't true...]

More Libby Allegations Surface. [Yawn.]

One-legged Man Sues Store For Making Him Buy A Pair Of Shoes. [The *bastards!*]

Willpower is no match for horsepower. [Uh... okay...]

6 Sure-Fire Ways To Get Sympathy Sex From Gals. [Does Bat Boy know about this?]

And that's enough to make my point.

Some of the highest paid writers in the world are the guys penning the headlines for "must see" shows like E!... top tabloids like the Weekly World News and the National Enquirer... and the cover of hard-hitting magazines like Cosmopolitan and Maxim.

These writers are *wicked* clever wordsmiths...

... but not in the way headline writers for the Times and mainstream ad agencies consider "clever".

The mainstream guy will get a chuckle swiping the old Star Trek line, in a news story about commercial spaceflight, and drenching it in post-modernist irony: **A Bold Plan To Go Where Men Have Gone Before.**

That's a groaner.

At the other end of the pay-scale, an irony-free tabloid writer will hook your secret desire to ogle human train wrecks: **Plastic Surgery Disasters!**

The frustrated screenwriter trying his hand at copywriting ("*How hard can it be?*") stares at the new Cingular cell phone he's supposed to get people excited about... figures he's got to be *beyond* hip or the other writers will call him a hack... and comes up with: **Done. Better.**

What the hell does that even *mean*?

Meanwhile, true art is being created at the tabloids. My classic favorites, from a while ago: **Boy Eats Own Head.**

And: **Preacher Explodes On Pulpit.**

Your headline has GOT to be a little dangerous. In many cases -- like direct mail, or in magazines, or online where cold traffic has stumbled upon your site -- just being a sales pitch is bothersome to your reader.

You've barged into his life, essentially.

He doesn't know you, doesn't care about you or your business, and (according to the latest online eye movement studies) will give you all of about *one-twentieth of a second* (less than a blink) before shoving your copy aside and forgetting you ever existed.

So you gotta strike quick, and hard.

The academic researchers of that eye study (it was published in the Behavior & Information Technology Journal), however, had no clue what *did* appeal to the average flitting eye. Clueless.

They “guess” it will eventually be proven that certain design magic will do the trick... and you can bet that mainstream advertisers will heartily agree.

And in some instances, they may be right. The Weekly World News always features a suggestive eye-candy shot of their Page 5 girl on the cover. They wouldn't do it if it didn't work.

However, until the hidden secrets of design appeal *are* unlocked -- if they ever are, which I doubt -- you will be best served by learning the less mysterious voodoo of world-class *copy* to do your eye-grabbing.

People seeing my more outrageous headlines for the first time often laugh...

... but while they're laughing, they're also *processing the information* stored in the words.

So while your average golf magazine headline says “Play Better Golf! By Tiger Woods”... my ad assaults you with the beginning of a real story:

**“How A Skinny Little Golf Genius From California Accidentally Started Hitting
425-Yard Tee Shots!”**

This is a good example of a tactic I borrowed from the tabloids -- which I named “*the incongruous juxtaposition of diverse, compelling sales elements.*”

Don't you love it when I talk fancy?

The plain English translation of that is: Your headline should *challenge* the reader with specific details that don't seem to add up.

The weak defeat the strong. The ugly win over the beautiful. The poor out-class the rich. And so on.

It's the stuff of good fiction -- full of *tension*, unexpected *plot twists*, and *images* that bloom instantly into full-color panorama detail.

The average golfer -- most cannot score below 90 to save their lives on an easy course -- may adore Tiger Woods... but he doesn't in a million years believe that Tiger has any *real* advice for him.

Why not?

Let's see... Tiger: Young, in peak physical shape, rich enough for private coaches and daily massages and a different chef for every meal... with the best equipment, and dedicated mentoring

since toddler-hood.

Average guy: Overweight, out of shape, never gonna GET back into shape... not rich... eats a lot of microwavable dinners... took a few lessons once from the course pro that confused the heck out of him.

Now, he may not trust a skinny little genius-twerp, either... but at least he'll be more inclined to read a bit of the copy first, because the hook appeals to his suspicions about pro's holding out on him.

And, if I didn't nail him on that one, he'll soon be reading another headline asking

“How Does An Out-Of-Shape 55-Year-Old Golfer, Crippled By Arthritis & 71 Lbs. Overweight, Still Consistently Humiliate PGA Pros In Head-To-Head Matches By Hitting Every Tee Shot Farther And Straighter Down The Fairway?”

Will anyone *not* interested in golf read such a long-winded headline... leading to an even longer-winded stretch of body copy?

Who cares?

I'm not after anyone who isn't in the target demographic.

If hitting longer, straighter tee shots is one of your most passionate dreams... and you're suspicious about the standard advice in the mainstream mags... then you're in my sights.

Both the skinny genius and the crippled golfer ads ran and mailed steadily for over ten years each.

So, yeah, people read 'em.

Now, in the time left, let's rip these two “home run” headlines apart a bit.

Each are variations on the most *simple* of all headline tactics -- the “how to” delivery of detailed information.

Take out the specifics and you get: “How A [*blank*] Accidentally Started [*blank*]”.

(Actually, the Power Word “accidentally” is so key to the headline working that it should be taken out too. Other verbs -- *powerful* verbs, not boring ones -- can be introduced that will radically change the tone of the story. I could have used “amazingly”, or “suddenly”, or even “belligerently”... each offering a different nuance.)

And for the second ad: “How Does This [*blank*] Still [*blank*] In [*blank*] By [*blank*]?”

Each choice in the phrases used to flesh this headline out was *crucial*. I labored over every detail for a very long time, using the information I had gleaned from my research.

My research, of course, was deep and done with a nose for the *incongruous and compelling*.

The skinny genius never said he was skinny, and probably never considered himself so. But he *is* slender, compared to most Americans. Certainly thin. Skinny carries more “weight”, copy-wise.

The accident? He was fooling around on the range, experimenting, and couldn't believe what he'd done. Repeated everything, and hit another long blast.

Launched an official 425-yard drive during a long-drive championship competition. On *television*.

I don't make ANY of this stuff up, folks.

I don't need to.

When you do your research correctly, you'll find it. (I suppose I'll need to spend a Rant talking about being a sales detective here, soon.)

So... while I'm not writing about UFOs causing people to suddenly become great golfers... I *do* keep those tabloid tactics of hooking and grabbing readers in mind while I craft my headline.

That's my big secret tactic.

I'd like to say it's a fine line between the absurd and the ridiculous... but it's not. Some of my best-pulling headlines were *completely* ridiculous. Absurd, even.

I just made damn sure they were also *loaded* to the gills with specific details aimed dead at the quivering emotional sweet spot of my target reader.

The simple-yet-outrageous stuff just gets his attention in that blink I've got to do it. He pauses, allows the avalanche of words to assault his brain... and, hopefully, even startles a little bit.

Gets excited. Comes aboard.

A great ad is like a greased slide. Your reader climbs on at the top, and just rips through the copy at an ever-gathering pace until he arrives, breathless and wowed, at the moment of truth: The close.

Reading, in most instances, is a *passive* behavior. In through the eye, out through the cerebral cortex, with very little retention.

What you want to do with your copy, however, is *wake him up*. Tease him mercilessly with images of how his life could be, if only...

Well, right now, all we're concerned with is the headline. You want it to be a **pleasant smack across the face**.

Come to think of it... even if the researchers decide that certain graphic elements *can* do the job of hooking the reader (which, again, I doubt will happen), you still need killer copy to *close* the connection.

Even a riveting shot of Miss December won't get you much more than a few more seconds of eye time... and if your copy doesn't move the reader further into the pitch, you're *done*.

He'll thank you for providing the eye-candy... but that's not quite what you're after, is it?

Need More Carlton Advice?

His first course for marketers is a transformational thrill-ride you can devour in a weekend...

... yet, it will completely arm you with the simple-yet-brutally-effective advertising chops required to slaughter your competition and dominate your niche as quickly as possible.

It's called "Kick-Ass Copywriting Secrets of a Marketing Rebel"... and you cannot even imagine yet how much advanced business know-how and specific selling tactics this easy-to-absorb course short-cuts for you.

This is what to do next, and how to do it for maximum results... from creating your first product, to finding and persuading your first mob of deliriously-happy customers, to quickly establishing yourself as the most dangerously-good competitor in your niche.

When you're ready, zip over to John's notorious blog at <http://www.john-carlton.com> and click on the "Kick-Ass Copywriting Secrets" icon in the right hand column (under "Stuff To Buy").

Your satisfaction is, of course, guaranteed. You don't risk anything by seeing what's up.

This is, after all, the same course that sits on so many successful entrepreneurs' desks, dog-eared and well-used as the main resource guide for creating ads and fortifying all marketing channels.

Chapter Twelve:

Pirates, Salesmen, Zombies And Sneaking Off The Grid...

Wherein we explore the psychology of the sale, the myth of credentials, high-tech tsunamis and rationalizing the irrational. All while your life flashes before your eyes...

Did I ever tell you about the time I got (sorta) run over by a car?

No?

I was a junior in high school, and had just discovered the joys of attending my very first “*the parents aren’t home!*” party. A thousand kids shedding even basic inhibitions, music so loud it made your eyes water, and love in the air.

Well, okay, maybe not exactly love...

... more like a steam bath of estrogen and testosterone. Not quite as intoxicating as the booze, but much, *much* more pleasant.

This was the spring of 1969 (yes, I’m that friggin’ old), and we had just invented a model of fun that was destined to mutate throughout the following generations, bringing the sexual revolution and over-the-top partying to every corner of the nation.

(I’m joking -- we didn’t invent anything. Except for the music, what we were doing wasn’t much different from every other real-life Animal House-type party that had ever gotten out of control. And, from what my nephews tell me, the model still hasn’t changed much going into this century... again, except for the music.)

(And maybe the way the party *smelled*. The generation before me was still plastering their hair down with Brylcream and bee-hiving it up with ozone-killing hairspray. And not to be gross, but deodorant hadn’t become a science yet, either, so everyone splashed themselves with cologne and perfume before heading out to bust a move.

Makes me gag just imaging the toxins wafting through the haze at one of those soirees.)

(My peers were more into natural, “dry look” hairstyles, Hai Karate aftershave, musk roll-on, and slightly-less overbearing perfumes...

... except for the slut-wannabes, who doused themselves in everything they could shoplift from the Penny’s cosmetic counter. My nephews’ generation, I believe, were mostly low-key with the entire scent thing, or being “ironic” with patouli oil.)

(Still, the reek of spilled beer, smoldering cigarettes and screaming hormones pretty much trumps any other odor in a room crammed with teenagers, doesn't it.)

Where was I?

Oh, yeah, getting hit by a car.

So, I'm at this party, and Nature calls, and there is no way I'm gonna stand in line for the bathroom (which had been commandeered by a gaggle of girls who seemed to have set up camp).

So, my pal Kent and I wandered outside to do what all guys in all cultures do whenever they can: Pee in the wild.

The house -- a gorgeous Victorian from the previous century -- was situated between orchards and vineyards, very isolated. No streetlights.

As Kent and I crossed the dirt driveway, headed for a couple of alarmed lemon trees, a separate drama was unfolding at the back of the house. Three of the more hoodlum-oriented kids had grabbed the keg, thrown it in their Pontiac, and were in the process of popping the clutch and spitting gravel on their pursuers.

The noise from the party disguised the brouhaha, and without warning the Pontiac bore down on us.

Kent casually stepped off the driveway into the field, telling me a joke over his shoulder. He said he saw me, out of the corner of his eye, suddenly flip into a horizontal position about waist high, and fly sideways into the darkness beyond. Like a drop-kicked puppet.

My experience matched that observation. One second I'm about to take a step forward, and the next I'm sliding into third base ten yards to my left. Except there wasn't any third base.

The Pontiac slammed to a stop briefly, then kicked up more dust and careened around my prostrate body (barely) to the street beyond, peeling rubber.

I got up, dazed but not feeling any pain. We knew I'd flown ten yards because both Kent and I played football. I'd been thrown for a first down.

I brushed myself off, and we continued into the orchard, wet down a couple of trees, and walked back to the party. All we could figure was that, somehow, the car had stopped at *precisely* the perfect point of contact -- so I was launched with enough torque to fly, but not enough to break any bones.

When we went inside, the house was abuzz about the murder that had just taken place. The hoods in the Pontiac had run over someone, thrown the body in the trunk, and took off to bury it in the Mojave Desert or something.

Naw, I told people. It was me, and I was fine.

No one believed me. I should have been a celebrity, but instead I was dismissed as a liar.

Oh, cruel fate.

Fortunately, the next day word got out that the hoods were looking for me... because I *dented* the front fender of the Pontiac!

They'd recognized me as I bounced in front of them -- and they figured, since they were seniors and I was just a lowly junior, that I wasn't worth the effort to stop and help after nearly plowing me over.

But, apparently, I *was* worth hunting down because of the damage I'd inflicted on their precious ride.

The physics of the event still leave me baffled. There was enough force on my leg to dent solid chrome (this was before fiberglass safety bumpers, mind you, and those mid-sixties GM muscle cars were outfitted with real armor)... and to send me flying like an inverted Superman for thirty feet.

And yet, I barely had a bruise to show for it.

I was not drunk, either, if that's what you're thinking. At that point in my late-blooming life, I hadn't done more than sip someone else's brew here and there -- I was still a few parties away from breaking free of my tee-totaller upbringing.

All I can figure is... somebody or some *thing* is looking out for me.

And they know how to screw around with physics.

So I belatedly got to enjoy *some* brief fame as the guy who got hit by the car at the big party.

However, my mild celebrity was countered by the fact I had to lay low until the hoods got bored looking for me, so popularity-wise it was a wash. (Except that, right afterward, I accidentally got elected vice prez of the class for senior year... a job I didn't want, and performed with legendary cluelessness and ineptitude. I won't bore you with that yawn-inducing tale.)

The reason I bring *this* story up (you didn't think I had a point, did you) is that, two days ago...

... I nearly got run over *again*.

We were at some local museum event -- a long cry from a house party, I can tell you that -- and I was jogging across the road to get the car so we could go home.

Okay, I was jaywalking. And, it was snowing like crazy, as one of the last stubborn storms of the season drifted through.

Still, there were a lot of other people darting across the road with me, so the old guy gunning his Cadillac into a U-turn in the midst of us had no excuse.

He missed everyone but me... and I'm proud to say I still have the reactions of a vandal when it's crunch time.

I slammed one hand on the hood of the oncoming Caddy, pushed and leapt at the same time, and sort of ricocheted off the right fender, clear. He obviously didn't see me, because he just tootled along on his merry way, oblivious.

I like to think that -- had he actually run me over -- he would have noticed the *bump-bump* as his tires turned me into street mulch. And at least stopped long enough to see what kind of damage he'd done.

I also like to think that -- since the bastard was obviously drunk or unfit to be driving -- I left a large dent in his hood.

But that's not the point of this story, either.

No. Something else entirely is motivating me right now.

You see... over the years, I've had a number of near-misses with death and serious injury. And while I've mostly survived with nary a scratch (if I had a bigger ego, I'd be tempted to believe I'm being spared for something important later on), I am VERY familiar with the cliché of having your life pass before your eyes.

Actually, it doesn't happen exactly that way, especially if the danger is abrupt and clearly potentially lethal. The adrenaline dump you have dismantles your sense of time, and things slow down.

In one spectacular car wreck -- where I was passenger in a 240Z flying, airborne, into a tomato field at 90 mph -- I could hear the dashboard clock tick, twice, during the 100-yard flight toward our destiny of sitting in a pile of steaming, dislocated auto parts.

But in the seconds *afterward*... when the danger has passed, and you've had time to flex and probe for injuries... THEN the inner film reel takes off.

For me, it's not a linear film, like a home movie. It's more of a realization that I'm standing in this huge warehouse of memories and emotions and a refreshed sense of wonder at being alive.

I've had that feeling a lot.

I had it again, just after I'd cleared the grill and headlamps of the Caddy.

Kinda still-scared, kinda pissed off... but very much happy to be standing there, fit and uncrushed, with all my blood still coursing inside my body, instead of pooling somewhere on the pavement.

And *that's* the first thing I want to talk about this issue. It's the most critical realization you will ever make in this short, brutish and often cruelly-unfair life.

It's so simple, it's a cliché. But sometimes, even clichés carry real truth.

Here it is: **Don't take anything for granted.**

We live in the safest society man has ever known. Yes, there are still lots of gruesome ways to die -- just watch an episode of ER or House to get your updates -- but the vast majority of Americans live nearly charmed lives, compared to history and the rest of the world.

And yet, we seldom start the day with a sense of relief, and a hearty "Thanks" to the universe for providing us with another opportunity to live without the threats and dangers our ancestors had to contend with.

It is our *nature* to take things for granted. The safer we are, the more we tend to snooze our way through life... with a sense of entitlement to this easy road.

Little jarring episodes, like almost getting run over, serve a purpose -- to wake you up a bit.

I enjoy the periods of time (getting increasingly rare) when everyone I know is well, the rent is paid and the fridge stocked, and no known disaster is bearing down on me.

I call these episodes "Safety Zones". Sometimes, I'll take the phone off the hook, and disengage from the Grid as much as I can... and just revel in being able to relax completely.

I know there's some drama and tragedy gathering on the borders of my little world... and I'm willing to face them fully awake, with all the powers of effective living I have at my disposal.

But over the years, I've learned to enjoy my Safety Zones to the max, too.

My pal Kent, who accompanied me across the driveway at that party so long ago, didn't survive *his* encounter with a car. Just a few years later, he was run over -- hit and run -- and killed.

Gone. Just like that.

We were kids together, and I expected us to become adults together. Share notes, have a good laugh about the old days once in a while.

Not gonna happen.

The lesson: When you're with friends, and you're having fun... *acknowledge* it to yourself. Don't take it for granted.

Cuz things change, fast.

This kind of “grabbing the moment” is one of the first steps to waking up completely. I’ll bet you’ve had great times before, and not even realized *how* great they were... until long after the fact.

While you were living it out, you were distracted by details, or worrying about something you had to do later, or thinking about other things.

That’s the way of the zombie. That’s the way most of the world operates.

Waking up means embracing life fully. I touch on this subject frequently, and it’s still on my mind... because it’s important.

Here’s one way to work this “grab the moment” attitude into your daily life: People ask me all the time for shortcuts to becoming a better writer. My advice is simple:

Writers *write*.

So, write more.

And you can help yourself wake up along the way. Keep a journal. Try it -- at the end of each day, just log a few thoughts. But write *well*. Really focus on getting your point across.

No one needs to ever see this journal. In fact, I suggest you keep it a big damn secret... so you can really cut loose, and write without censoring yourself.

Heck, you have my permission to *burn* incriminating pages, right after you’ve written them.

But try it out for a few weeks, regardless. Fully wakeful people notice stuff that slips by everyone else. Great writers are great observers.

As are great salesmen.

Smell the roses.

Then write about it.

Tales From The Vice Squad

Now, for my next act, I want to plow through a pile of backlogged material -- stuff I’d considered important enough to take detailed notes on, in the hope of sharing it with you... but which never made it into a Rant.

Yep. We’re doing a little intellectual spring cleaning.

First Item: The Los Angeles Times reported, earlier this month, about a University of California

psychiatrist (a noted neuro-scientist and full professor, no less) who had lost up to \$3-million in one of those Nigerian Internet scams.

You know -- the email arrives from an associate of some African ruler, who needs to smuggle a vast fortune into the US with the help of some lucky American... and *you're* the lucky American they've chosen.

All you have to do is wire money to them and give them your bank account numbers. What could be more simple?

Or more profitable?

There's a lesson here for all marketers -- never, ever, EVER underestimate the pull of pure, raw greed. We're *all* susceptible to it. Even brain-scientists.

This prof was just *convinced*, solely from the email exchanges he'd had with his anonymous "royal" friend, that the scam was real. Even when confronted with evidence... and even when ordered by a court to stop... he continued to send money overseas to fuel the con.

His fellow shrinks could see what was going on, even if he was blind to it: Once bitten, victims of a scam will pour every resource they have into the kitty...

... in a sick, irrational attempt to *rationalize* their prior behavior. Good money after bad. It's the brain chemistry that keeps cults thriving, casinos open, and politics frustrating.

This also illustrates the myth of "credentials". Credentializing yourself in your ads is critical, because your prospect must know who you are, and see that you have *proof* of expertise... preferably with third-party endorsements, through believable testimonials.

But credentials can be fudged, and much of your target market knows that. A recent presidential appointee had to resign when it became news that he'd *made up* his entire educational history -- fancy degrees from major universities, all bogus.

Oops.

Not uncommon, though. But this is the reason your average prospect is highly skeptical of any claim you make... and unwilling to trust you without being *persuaded*.

The myth of credentials is most cruelly illustrated in the experience of the author who gets a slot on Larry King's cable TV show. He can wow Larry, and be amazingly eloquent for the entire hour... and still not sell a single book from the exposure.

Smart authors find a way to slip in some direct response call-to-action during their interview... and they really *can* see bumps in sales.

But the average guy, expecting PR to do any sales work for him, will be sorely disappointed.

Credentials are worthless without a pitch.

Item Two: A recent study may shed some light on this weird fact.

Researchers released a study last month that reveals brain activity in political fanatics. **Results:** Both left and right wing partisans clearly rejected bad news about “their side” at a subconscious, visceral stage of brain function... meaning, they don’t even realize they’re doing it.

And both sets of partisans were able to quickly *rationalize* ALL bad behavior by “their guys” as being okay... including blatant hypocrisy and even criminal behavior.

The kicker: When they discovered hypocrisy and bad doings in their *opponents*, their brains lit up like the Fourth of July, and they experienced an endorphin dump of “feel good” chemistry.

Political junkies really are junkies. Deluded about their own faults, and high on the foibles of their opponents.

All of this is relevant when you’re in a crowded market, trying to sell something.

People choose sides regarding quality (Bud drinkers who loathe microbrews, for example)... star power (choose your favorite guru, and hate his nemesis)... “taste” (listening to fashionistas go at each other’s throat can be enlightening)... and all sorts of other elements.

Great salesmen intuitively understand the psychology of the sale. If you lack this intuition, you’re not alone... but you gotta get hip, as best you can, and as fast as you can.

The lesson: Raise the blinders, and start seeing people for who they are, not who you *wish* they were.

And watch how they act, not how they *tell* you they’re going to act.

Item Three: In a perverse game of “Who’s Your Daddy”, Google killed a BMW web campaign... after the Germans had attempted a little cutting-edge search engine optimization.

The details seemed kind of petty, until I realized that Google had been facing some vicious blowback on their decision to let China censor Web access to their citizens. They needed to change the subject...

... and show business who was boss in the search engine game.

Normally, it’s only the old-school die-hard Web guys who complain about stuff like this -- the guys who still believe all software should be shareware (free and available to everyone), and all attempts to monetize the Internet are just wicked.

But this cozying-up with the thugs who rule China carries implications that should chill every Web-based business owner on the planet.

I love this country, but you'd have to be blind (or one of those partisans with the screwy brain chemistry) not to see that our own government has been steadily -- and with great delight -- flexing its authoritarian muscles every chance it gets.

And no one is making any serious effort to stop them, yet.

Read the polls -- the Bill of Rights doesn't fuel our freedom because everyone *likes* it.

In fact, most people would gladly *ditch* the Bill of Rights, if it helped them enjoy their life-long oblivious snooze any better.

Our citizenry are comfort-whores.

If they can do it in China, it's a *very* short leap to imagine it happening here. We are not immune. The trigger will probably be taxes. As more and more biz is done online, and less and less sales tax gets collected by the state... well, I think the powers-that-be have already braced themselves to *make* that little leap toward total control and censorship.

We're seeing the tip.

Google is succumbing to the maxim "absolute power corrupts absolutely". They may be doing this "Who's Your Daddy" routine in a state of honestly innocent delusion... but they're doing it.

Those handful of smart-ass kids who started the phenomenon of search engines, I imagine, are probably pretty weak on their history.

They may not even know what "fascism" means... but that's not keeping them from being wooed by their barely-conscious desire for maximum power and control.

No lesson here. Just be aware.

High-Tech Tsunami Department

Item Four: We've turned a very critical corner online.

Last fall, USA Today reported that 52% -- over half -- of all domestic computers now enjoy high-speed access.

That's *huge*. And the numbers will go up exponentially from here on out.

This means that all those high-tech goodies that only the uber-geeks could enjoy before... are about to

go mainstream.

I just posted my first podcast in iTunes -- a little gem titled "How To Create Your First Damn Good Ad... In Just 9 Minutes". I *like* this media.

One of my favorite stops during my morning surf is the twin-camera netcast of warring talking heads on www.bloggingheads.tv. Two blogger-pundits fire up their little monitor-cams, and on the split-screen you can watch 'em attempt to cure the world's ills.

Primitive, but pointing the way.

More and more television shows are offering rebroadcasts online. I predict the death of TV as we know it will occur within the year (more or less).

The *portability* of all media is starting to get scary, too. I have years of Word documents stored on a tiny little back-up thumb drive I can tuck into my pocket. My Sony laptop disappears in my briefcase when I drop it in -- I barely notice it's in there, it's so light. iPods have melded with phones, and...

It's just pure sci-fi, and I love it.

However, as a marketer, my main goal is not to conquer any given technological whiz-bang.

Nope.

My job is to see the potential for *using* it.

It's almost never obvious at first -- in fact, we get so caught up in the cultural changes made manifest by tech... like the way cell phones have connected us to people we don't even really like talking to... that we sometimes miss the *marketing* implications.

Like, for example, the shopper standing in the aisle (or in the showroom sales office), Googling info before making her decision.

My big hope is for *smell-o-vision* to come back.

In the fifties, a couple of enterprising horror movies tried to install little "odor boxes" under the seats of selected theaters. So, when a rose appeared on the screen, a puff of rose scent shot out and stained your pants leg.

Didn't catch on, for some reason.

But don't despair -- one of the driving forces of advances on the Web is the quest to bring all of our senses into play. The visual and auditory stuff was a snap. I hear the porn industry is making huge strides with tactile tools to hook up to your computer. (Hopefully you'll wait until you're home and alone, so you don't startle people at Starbucks.)

The smell thing can't be far behind.

It's the most effective, and quickest, way to trigger memory, you know. You can look at a photo of your first date, hear the music that played on the car radio, even feel the fabric of your white sports coat or her crinoline dress...

... and you still won't experience the **POW!** of distinct, photographic memory that a single whiff of her perfume will trigger, instantly.

Think about it.

Salesmanship 101

Item Five: You can always tell when you're hanging out with a seasoned, veteran salesman.

Because there will *never* be a problem, neither in life nor business, that he won't have an idea on how to solve.

A *good* idea, too.

Rookies -- and I include people who've been in business all their lives here, who've just never made that leap to true competence -- often sit down and give up when confronted with an obstacle.

Part of it is the fear of moving into a new project. It's *sooooo* much easier to just announce you've hit a dead-end and need to quit... than to trudge onward, in the face of overwhelming odds, obsessed on achieving your goal.

So, most people just quit.

Not the pro's. This is one of the skills you earn doing Hot Seats -- faced with the stubborn specter of seemingly unsolvable problems... you just keep opening doors until you find one that leads you out of the dilemma.

It's not brain science.

But it can look wicked-clever to the outsider.

Here's the basic equation: First, figure out what you really want. You gotta really, really, *really* want it, too. No casual appetites allowed.

Then, you gotta *forget* about all the ways you and everyone else has already tried and failed.

Don't focus on the ways it *can't* be done. That will get you mired in group-think determined to guarantee you never find a solution.

This is why committees seldom come with answers for anything. A group of fools is still gonna come up with foolish ideas.

When I do Hot Seats, I either do them alone... or with the help of selected people rippling with brain power... and an honest “get ‘er done” attitude.

What you will see, when you observe truly talented marketing experts chewing up a problem, is not pure “outside the box” thinking... but rather, a studied exercise of lightning-fast *learning from failure*...

... and the equally fast building up of a *workable* plan.

Veteran salesmen make the best thinkers during a Hot Seat. They never get flustered at dead ends, never give up, and never quit adjusting their assault on the problem... until they find a way to make it work.

One example: Long ago... after I’d already produced a couple of dozen seminars... I realized there was a simple way to guarantee a great event.

Not for the attendee. No, you make the attendee happy by providing awesome information and content.

I’m referring to the poor guy *giving* the seminar.

Time and time again, I’ve heard people say they can’t even bear the thought of putting an event on... because of all the hassles inherent in such a project.

My advice: Figure out what you don’t want to do... and then don’t *do* it.

There are seminars scheduled this year that include all meals, with special sessions all over the place, stage shows that include giving away cars and computers, and other goodies that make the event rival a 3-ring circus.

Which is fine, if you have the fortitude to host such an event.

I don’t. Never will. And if I had to make my seminars black-tie extravaganzas... I simply wouldn’t put one on.

Instead... I put on the event that makes ME happy.

I don’t have to travel, don’t have to dress up, don’t have to host dinners, don’t have to do anything that doesn’t excite me at all.

I just figured out what I didn’t want to do... and I don’t *do* it.

That leaves all the other stuff that I do enjoy about seminars.

Which is all about teaching and having a great personal experience.

It's the same with everything else you ever set out to accomplish. If you listen to "how everyone else does it", you may lose enthusiasm, because of the hassle and expense and lack of fun.

This covers almost everything out there: Weddings, product creation, setting up an office, doing joint ventures, hiring a staff... and on and on. Planning a vacation, even.

If you get trapped in the notion that there are "rules" you must follow, you're done.

So *skip* the rules. Make up your own. Figure out what you don't want to do, and don't do that. Then, get hip to what you **DO** want to do...

... and **DO** that.

Simple. But *advanced* advice.

Item Six: I get ripped off on eBay a lot. I have someone who, each morning, checks eBay for rip-offs and has them shut down.

It's sort of like having mice in the house. They're not gonna run you out, but you gotta pay attention or you'll become a hot spot on the Mouse Tour Map. (You didn't know mice hosted hostels?)

Piracy is a problem. Globally, there aren't that many places where you can effectively sue someone for transgressing on your turf. (You can, of course, still reach them with a hit squad... but that's so messy.)

It's frustrating. You sweat and grind out a spot in your niche... and then some ass-face scurries in and steals your thunder.

Mostly, it's annoying. But it can stop your business cold, too, if you're not careful.

The classic notion of pirates comes from the vulnerabilities of the way cargo was shipped.

The Silk Road, bringing spices and other goodies from the Orient to Europe, required caravans with armed guards. The shipping lanes bringing breadfruit from the tropics (and swapping opium for tea) were thick with renegade frigates willing to attack and plunder. Nazi subs almost brought England to her knees, sinking massive tonnage of freight needed for basic survival.

Hollywood has made pirates romantic and noble. They weren't. The part in the Marine song that goes "*to the shores of Tripoli*" refers to America's first brush with Muslim pirates 150 years ago. The Tripoli warlords insisted that their God not only gave them permission to loot the ships of non-

believers... but also to pack the crew away into slavery.

Yes, our beef with the Middle East goes *waaay* back.

Bring in the Marines.

Fortunately, as marketers, we face less daunting circumstances. You can get hijacked on the Virtual Highway, but you won't get sold into slavery. (Well, maybe your identity will...)

There are many tricks you can use to put a few odds in your favor, but none are foolproof.

My suggestion is simple: If you sell pure information, know that -- if you're successful -- you WILL be ripped off.

Do what you can to limit your losses, and certainly go *after* anyone you can find.

I'm all for putting hackers and thieves away for very long times, in very miserable lodgings.

But also, take steps to make piracy next-to-impossible. You can do this... by **making yourself part of the product**.

They can rip my course. But they can't rip my *personality*.

For example, my "product" is just little old me. It's what I bring to the table, with my peculiar method of teaching and ranting.

Updates are easy, and I do them often... because I didn't rip this material in the first place.

It's all from *my* head, and *my* experience.

Every once in a while, someone shows up who bought a rip of my stuff on eBay (before we could shut the auction down)... and is *astonished* to discover that I won't give them a critique, or even answer simple questions they have.

They thought (deep in their twisted rationalizing mind) they were buying full access to me. They *paid* someone else, who bragged to them about offering rip-offs... and yet, somehow, they imagined starting a relationship with me as part of the transaction.

Sorry, kid. The written material is only a small part of the package.

The real meat... is me.

Got that? *I'm* the meat...

Okay, I'm starting to go off on dangerous tangents here, and I have to finish up. We're taking a little

vacation over the hill to the Napa Wine Valley tomorrow.

For once, I'm heeding some of my own advice, and cooling my heels for a long weekend, out of town and away from the Grid.

See what spring's been up to for the last week or so.

Did You Know You Can Get Personal Advice From John Carlton?

You can schedule a one-hour phone consultation with John. They call this one-hour session a "Brain Cleanse", because John go deep into your biz model, sort out and solve problems you identify (and expose problems you may be overlooking), and generally focus our decades of experience on whatever situation you need help with...

... which can include everything related to marketing, writing for your biz, improving your online or offline sales processes, finding more prospects, increasing conversion, smoothing out operations and more.

Note From John: "This is serious business help for people who are serious about fixing problems and getting the best possible insight and advice from a respected, proven professional.

This is NOT cheap. This hour will cost you \$2,500 up front. There is no refund, so be sure I'm the guy you want to consult with before scheduling a session. I've been helping business owners and entrepreneurs and marketers and even other consultants for decades now. I've spent 30 years on the front lines of the biz world, seen it all (from the wildest possible success stories to the most dumb self-destruction of a good biz model) at all levels...

... and if you want that kind of real-world experience put to use for your benefit, then grab this opportunity to talk personally with me. The hour is yours -- you can ask specific questions, or go through specific ads or copy, or just mine my brain for any info, advice or knowledge you need."

Email my personal assistant Diane to set up your consultation (or get your questions about a consultation answered): consult@john-carlton.com

Chapter Thirteen:

Life, Learning Curves, And Blowing Shit Up...

How to deal with vapor-locked brains, while refusing to go medieval on nature, and why you'll never make the big bucks without getting in touch with your own prior cluelessness.

Got a minute?

If you do, I'll tell you what two structural engineers -- one human, and one a squirrel -- recently taught me about life, learning curves, and blowing shit up.

Mostly, it was the squirrel, though.

The engineer just popped into and out of my awareness by purchasing my "Kick Ass Copywriting Secrets" course, glancing at it, and then returning it for a refund.

Took him about three pages in his email to tell me why he was returning the course. I'm sure he spent more time writing the email than he did looking over the material.

My presentation, he said, was too disorganized. As an engineer, he said, he liked his learning process to be tidy and... well, *organized*.

He needed a "how to" course, and in his opinion I'd written some sort of haphazard diary of an unorganized freelancer.

Okey-dokey.

Normally, I never read people's reasons for requesting refunds. If my assistant Diane sees them first, I never know a refund wandered in (until I see the bookkeeping numbers).

If I do stumble on one by accident, I toss it like a hot potato, unread, over to her for processing.

And I advise *you* not to read anyone's reasons for requesting a refund, either. No matter how off-base or insane they are, their comments will take root in your brain and grow like some alien weed, eventually occupying every square inch of your consciousness.

And you'll waste outrageous amounts of time crafting your response... countering every nuance of the refundee's argument, and detailing all the ways they are wrong and evil and basically the scum of the earth.

If you DO succumb to this urge, and write that reply email, at least have the self-respect not to *send* it. Just don't. You will accomplish nothing. And often, you will ignite a very negative pen-pal exchange that will eat up even more of your time.

And, again, accomplish *nothing*.

Caveat: Of course, if you get a lot of refunds, and the reasons given seem to form a common theme...

... then you *should* pay attention to why people hate you. There's a problem either in your product or your offer, and you can use what you learn from unhappy former customers (even the insane ones) to fix things.

In *this* case, however, that caveat doesn't apply. I have a miniscule refund rate for "Kick Ass Copywriting Secrets". I'm actually embarrassed to let my colleagues know how low it is, because (as I've said many times before) a too-low refund rate means you aren't marketing aggressively enough.

Generally, you should strive to have around a 7% to 15% return rate. That's roughly the percentage of butt-head morons in any given market, and you should position your product or service to *piss them off*.

I'm dead serious. If too many butt-heads buy your product and are so passive about it that they won't even bother to return it... then you're very likely under-pricing your stuff and being too timid in your sales pitch.

You'll never make the big money playing it safe. You can even use a too-small refund rate to judge how much higher you should price your stuff. Just jack it up until you reach a 7-15% come-back.

Anyway, back to the squirrel tale.

I didn't respond to the engineer.

Well, that's a lie. I actually grabbed a copy of the Kick Ass course and went through the table of contents first. And noted all the ways I'd actually detailed *every step* of writing an ad.

It is *very* organized, of course. And tidy. And structurally sound. Do this, then do this, then do that. (Section III, for example, is titled "The Lazy Businessman's 3-Step Shortcut To Your First World-Class Ad." Can't get much more how-to than that.)

I only spent about... oh, an hour... doing this.

And then, yeah, I wrote a reply email, tearing his critical assessment to shreds and casting documented doubt on his manhood.

Excellent use of time.

Fortunately, I exercised my final escape option at the last minute... and deleted the email before sending it.

Man, criticism can be *dangerous*.

I'll never get those hours back.

Still, I was able to find a silver lining. The notion that one man's organization is another man's Tower of Babel got me to thinking.

My entire teaching career has been about breaking complex skills down to their **simplest basic components**. It took me long years to learn to write well, and I blundered down every blind alley and made every rookie mistake there is while doing it.

I crawled through the Valley of Advertising Death, and somehow survived and achieved my goal of becoming a really, really good copywriter.

And because I learned my lesson each time I encountered an obstacle, I clearly understand how to help others *avoid* them, while still acquiring the top skills.

That's why the motto of my Rant newsletter has always been "*Truth & Order Amidst the Chaos*".

I was IN the chaos. I beat it into submission, and learned how to *dominate* the complex world of advertising and marketing.

And I am confident I can show almost anyone how to shortcut their own learning curve. I'll reveal the truth, and do it in an orderly way.

As you should know by now, my philosophy for advertising and life is identical: Look at the world *not* how you wish it was or believe it should be... but how it actually is.

In other words -- open yourself up to the truth of the reality in front of you.

It often isn't pretty. It can, in fact, trigger fear and loathing.

And confusion.

The ugliness and the fear and loathing can be dealt with by just taking a deep breath, and facing down your urge to go back to bed and pull the covers over your head.

But the *confusion*...

... well, that can, occasionally, curdle your brain.

So that's why I have allowed the engineer's criticisms to hang around a bit longer. He's clearly wrong on the face of his accusation -- the course is laid out in classic "how to" fashion.

But here's the kicker: In a handful of my critiques of people's ads, and in a few of the private phone consultations I've done... I find myself faced with a student who just doesn't *get* it.

Usually, a virtual slap upside the head can clear the cobwebs... but in certain cases, no matter how many different ways I frame the answer to their questions... that light bulb just never goes off over their head.

It's a rare occurrence. But it happens.

Now, I've studied learning processes a bit. Some folks are aural, meaning they do better listening to stuff... more are visual, which means videos help them learn faster... and others are either predominately left or right brain.

Meaning they all tend to process incoming information in vastly different ways.

Most writers are right-brained (where the "creative" functions are lumped together).

But most high-paid *copywriters* have developed the ability to "cross over" from left to right. We can process information like an accountant... and then shift it over to the other hemisphere and spit out creative copy like a Pulitzer Prize winner.

As a teacher, my job is to present lessons in ways that can be understood by everyone. I'd be a rotten professor if I could only help people who thought like I do.

Now, I believe one of the reasons that my writing courses have been such successes... is precisely *because* I've used my "straight from the trenches of the real world" experience to craft each lesson in a way that is easily absorbed by almost *any* internal processing style.

However, as I cogitate on this failure I've had with this one sorry-ass engineer... I can't see a down side to forcing myself to re-examine things a bit.

In fact... I can see how breaking down the learning process further can be a double-barreled lesson. Because all deconstruction processes can be applied to the job of creating killer advertising.

There's more than one way to skin a cat.

Or a squirrel. (Yes, we're back to furry rodents again.)

Hang with me for a second, will ya?

Just thinking about Mr. Squirrel gets me all riled up again...

Here's that part of the story: About two months ago, the dogs go berserk in the back yard, howling and barking like unreasonable, primitive beasts.

Something's got their blood lust up.

At first, I think they've been digging up the yard, because there's a HUGE mound of dirt and rocks piled up against the garage. We're talking rocks the size of softballs, and enough earth to fill an entire new garden.

But it's not the dogs.

There's a *hole* leading under the foundation. Some feral beast has invaded my property and begun serious excavation work.

My mind starts racing. We live in the foothills of the Sierra Nevada, human encroachers on the wild lands of the high desert. It's not unusual to find deer munching on the landscaping, herds of suicidal rabbits playing chicken in the road day and night, or a family of raccoons living in the curb-side sewer grate.

And, just last week, a troop of BEARS have been spotted in the neighborhood.

From the fresh spoor in my grass, it looks like Smokey and the cubs have set up a bedroom in the pine tree near our front door.

God, I hate being a homeowner.

And what, I wonder, is behind this new assault in the *back* yard?

I'm a total rookie at this. Growing up in Southern California, we had just two types of varmint -- gophers and crows. The gophers plowed up the lawn and the crows devoured everything on the fruit trees.

We showed mercy to neither. Every summer, Pop would lower this gnarly medieval device with lethal steel spikes into the fresh tunnels... and for my eighth birthday, I received a full-power BB gun and explicit permission to blow Heckle and Jeckle to smithereens.

Now, I'm not a pacifist, and I eat red meat with gusto... but I've long since wussed out when it comes to death. Sure, we poisoned the bejesus out of the carpenter ants chewing their way through the support beams... but standing in the aisle at Home Depot contemplating which agent of demise to deal this shadowy beast excavating my foundation...

... well, I just couldn't go the medieval route.

So I picked up one of these new-fangled "humanitarian" traps. You put bait in it, capture the animal, and then *let it go* somewhere far, far away.

Seems simple.

Isn't.

Big damn learning curve.

For the first two weeks, whatever this creature was mocked my attempts at capture. It had been living high on Michele's tomato patch, but every luscious, ripe tom I planted in the cage was gone the next day... without the trap being triggered.

Meanwhile, the pile of rocks and dirt reached knee-level. Every time I tried to cover up the hole, he'd just dig a new opening a few feet away.

My yard was starting to look like a reef.

So I upped the ante, and tied down a peanut butter sandwich at the far back of the cage. Figured that might throw the beast off balance while he was straddling the trap trigger.

About an hour later, I caught our wire-hair terrier. She likes peanut butter. Didn't seem to mind being wedged into a cage with no escape, and wagged her tail for hours after being set free.

Finally, late one morning the dogs were outside howling in new and frightening ways. I'd never heard those snarls and yips come from the pack before.

And there, frantic but safe in the trap, was a grungy, scrawny, wild-eyed ground squirrel. Maybe weighed all of half a pound.

THIS was the earth-moving beast trying to collapse my garage?

Feeling like Earnest Hemingway after a successful safari hunt, I drove the caged squirrel a mile away, and let him loose behind the offices of a realtor I don't like. Opened the cage and watched him scurry off into the brush.

He was back at my house before I was.

Did I mention I hate being a homeowner?

At least now I knew what I was up against. I Googled for info, pressed friends and neighbors for tips, and called federal agencies.

Here's what I learned, in no particular order or relevance or truth: Ground squirrels like fenced yards because the coyotes can't get them... and most dogs are too slow as predators.

You can't flood them out because they dig looping tunnels that keep water from reaching their nest. If you poison them, the stink won't go away for years.

If you ignore them, they'll take over. (I had visions of them learning to use the microwave, and

answering the door in my robe, puffing contentedly on a pipe.) (Not sure where they would have found a pipe, though. Crafty devils.)

And the feds were very helpful. They recommend humane traps... but then suggest you go *drown* the little bugger in the river. (It's actually a misdemeanor in many areas to release captured squirrels.)

And no, they won't come pick them up for you. Deer and bears, the feds will arrive with SWAT teams. For Mr. Squirrel -- you're on your own, Mr. Homeowner.

The next time I caught him -- it took a week and several more tomatoes -- I drove 15 miles out of town. Down near the legal brothels. (You knew Nevada had legal brothels, right? Kinda hidden out in the sticks, so the respectable newcomers from California don't freak out.)

Michele told everyone I left Mr. Squirrel in the parking lot of the Mustang Ranch with twenty bucks and a cigarette.

Fine. Laugh at me.

Turns out that Nature has imbued ground squirrels with GPS (global positioning satellite) technology. Took him a few days, but he was *back* digging up the irrigation before the dogs even missed him.

The final time I caught him -- after he'd enjoyed more tomatoes than anyone else had -- I crossed two rivers, the freeway and a stretch of coyote-infested desert... and dropped him off near a mound riddled with the holes of other squirrels. Squirrel condominiums.

He hasn't been back in several weeks, so I have high hopes. Though, it seems one of his distant non-digging cousins may have taken up residence in the attic...

And, okay, here's the point of all this: Once again, I experienced the cluelessness of a raw rookie in a matter that (obviously) obsessed me to the point of distraction.

My learning curve was like a roller coaster, full of dead ends and false hopes and misinformation and bad choices.

And yet, now... merely by sticking with it... I am an *experienced* squirrel hunter.

What WAS complex and mysterious... is now obvious and simple to me.

If I were to teach someone what to do when they discover a ground squirrel digging up their property... I could complete the *advanced*-level lesson in under ten minutes.

Every detail -- the choices between traps, the consequences of each method, and the knowledge that 15 miles (and nearby hookers) aren't enough to seal the deal -- was, at first, complex... but now, after hard experience, *easy*.

I can explain to you, step by step, how to go about the entire process. It ain't rocket science.

And yet... I couldn't find this kind of easy "how to" guide *anywhere* else. Not on Google. Not from official animal services. Not from neighbors.

It was only through trial and error (lots of error) that I finally succeeded. And yes, I even bought one of those grisly slice-and-dice traps at one point... but never had to use it.

Now, maybe you're an experienced homeowner, and you're laughing at me, too. How hard can it be to catch a little, cute squirrel, anyway? Or maybe you grew up on a farm, where life and death was a daily occurrence, no big deal, and nailing pests was something you were jaded about before you were out of knickers.

Doesn't matter.

I'm talking about the **learning process** here.

And if you're selling information... or if your product has a learning curve, or your service requires a "get hip" stage... then this is critical stuff.

Most people understand that it's a good thing to "**KISS**" -- keep it simple, stupid.

They understand it, but not in a *visceral* way. They quickly FORGET what it was like going through their *own* learning curves...

... and start making all kinds of wrong assumptions about what it will take for their *customers* to navigate those same complexities of cluelessness.

Because no matter how simple YOU think something is... it's still a mysterious adventure to the uninitiated.

Consider learning to swim.

You can read a thousand books on the subject... you can have an experienced swimmer talk to you for hours... and you can watch every DVD ever made about swimming...

... and you STILL will sink like a rock in the deep end of the pool your first time out.

If your teacher doesn't viscerally understand your cluelessness, and structure his lesson in a way that addresses your physical, your mental, AND your emotional needs... then you'll fail.

The bottom line is this: It doesn't matter how well YOU understand the lesson.

If your job is to help someone ELSE understand it, then you must go deep into the learning process of

your student... and ignore all your own biases.

I don't care whether you're teaching someone to paint murals, to make money with Websites, to open a franchise store, or catch squirrels.

People crave knowledge. It's what fuels civilization. But we have a love/hate relationship with it, too.

Ever watch any of the do-it-yourself cable channels?

There must be a dozen of them now -- full of hour-long shows revealing the secrets of bathroom remodeling, pimping rides, and (my favorite) building rocket launchers from junk ("Myth Busters").

Everything is laid out in exquisite detail, and it's a joy to watch experts confidently rip out walls, realign electrical circuits, and deftly sand, paint and finish restoring trashed furniture while working under impossible deadlines.

But you don't REALLY learn how to do most of this stuff.

It's an illusion.

In fact, it's a good homework assignment to watch one of those shows... take as many notes as you can (even tape it and study it over and over again)... and then go DO the project.

What you will discover -- standing in the rubble of your ruined bathroom, with crackling electrical wires dangling near your head and water gushing from broken pipes -- is that those experts were being *glib*.

That means "superficially slick".

And that's different than crafting a way to present complex tasks in a way that can honestly be *learned* quickly.

I always urge marketers to bend over backward to present their material in ways that can be accurately described as "*fast, simple, easy and cheap*". That's the mantra of successful marketing.

But you can't just SAY what you have is fast, simple, easy and cheap.

You gotta *prove* it.

And that means you really gotta deliver on that promise.

Take rocket science, for example.

It's complex, requiring mucho education in physics and geometry and thermodynamics... and it sure

ain't cheap.

And yet... when I was five, the kid across the street showed up one day with all the fixin's for a gee-whiz bottle rocket. MacGyver-like, we scratched up caps (do they still make ammo for cap guns?) until we had a teaspoon of gunpowder... ground up match-heads for a fuse...

... and used gauze and glue for sealing a Dr Pepper bottle in the way thousands of other vandals all over the globe had done for generations.

Bang!

Wow.

Starting brush fires, frying fingers, and scaring the crap out of neighbors was all part of the learning process.

But we sent an astonishing menu of otherwise earth-bound objects skyward... with absolutely *zero* knowledge of physics, thermodynamics, or anything your average NASA scientist takes for granted.

We also were happily ignorant of any laws governing the operation of explosives in populated areas.

(My cousin David won all our respect by blasting an abandoned refrigerator twenty feet into the air, hiding behind a flimsy sheet of plywood and using a lit match for a fuse. It was right out of a Roadrunner cartoon.)

Bottle rocket... Gemini space capsule.

Write a decent ad... become a multi-millionaire marketer.

(Relocate stubborn squirrels... graduate to the ranks of totally-experienced homeowner.)

We tend to forget what it was like being clueless...

... and what it took to reach that *first* critical stage of being clued in.

It was uncomfortable being naive, and maybe people laughed at us, or our self-esteem was low.

So we *want* to forget those bad times of being out in the cold. That was then, this is now... and what're YOU looking at, rookie?

But, as a marketer, you can't afford to pretend you always knew how to do everything right. It's your JOB to be the go-to guy, the expert who can communicate in ways that make your customer's life easier and better and more fruitful.

You also can't rely on formal academia for clues on *how* to teach these things.

For example... I took around fifty years of Spanish in school, starting in the fourth grade. It was grueling, because it had no relevance to my life.

Why, my brain cried out, do I gotta learn how to ask where the library is in Spanish?

A street-savvy marketer would know better. We lived three hours from Tijuana, and the entire extended family would frequently make a day of it as tourists.

Now, if my teacher had bothered to instruct us how to buy cherry bombs and switchblades in the outdoor markets -- and maybe hook up with some of the lovely Latinas who mostly regarded us as barbarians in their midst -- we would have obsessed on our Spanish lessons until our eyes bled.

But no. It was "*Donde esta la biblioteca*", year after useless year.

By the time I hit college -- and had to complete two years of a foreign language in order to graduate -- I was so fed up with the irrelevance that I flirted, begged and used peer pressure on my teacher to pass. (Which, amazingly enough, actually worked, and is another lesson we'll have to discuss sometime.)

But I still have no fluency whatsoever in a language I wish, dearly, that someone had figured out how to teach to me.

It's a crime, I tell ya.

Okay, back to the human engineer. (The one who used machines to excavate, not his claws.)

Somehow, my carefully-crafted step-by-step teaching process didn't connect with his brain. Fortunately, as I said, this isn't a huge problem, because the vast majority of my target market "groks" my teaching style with ease.

But if it WERE a problem... I'd have to rethink how I teach.

As a marketer, anytime you have to impart knowledge that you possess to someone else, you're operating in teaching mode.

It's easy to fall into a rut, where you get your "patter" down, and stop considering the *effect* of your style.

Yet, in the real world, the ONLY thing that matters is the effect. The results.

So, just to exercise my brain, I've been thinking of different ways to explain what is so familiar to me. Just being contrary to the style I've used -- however successfully -- over the years is kinda invigorating.

Here goes: Let's break down the essence of a good ad to three simple parts.

First, the psychology of your target prospect. What keeps him awake at night, what bugs him, and -- most of all -- what makes his stomach go ice-cold?

Don't skip this part of the deconstruction process. Most marketers go right to consideration of what would make their prospect *happy*. However, as university studies show, "happiness" is a relative state, and NOT one that people stay in very long.

In fact, the only people who are happy all the time have something *wrong* with them. When it reaches a manic stage, it's time for pharmacology.

Second -- what IS it about your service or product that will *fix* what ails your prospect?

Consider this entire "contrary" angle as thoroughly as possible. When I'm happy, and I hear a song that jives with my happiness, I enjoy the moment as deeply as possible. But I don't necessarily pay attention to the song.

However, if I'm down, and a song makes me feel better, I'm *very* interested in that song. I'll even make a note to check out buying it as soon as I can dial up the iTunes store.

In the general marketplace, it's easy to disassociate yourself from the emotional turmoil of your prospect.

I have, over the years, consulted with large numbers of marketers yearning to tackle the diet market, for example. Yet, there is a near-total disconnect on the emotional level.

The vast majority of products and services out there exist because they *solve a problem*. In the diet market, your prospect is *hurting*. Not just annoyed, not even pissed off at the "lies" of the weight loss industry.

They're in *pain*. They are experiencing a deep level of real trauma.

And if you don't connect with that, you're going to be just so much passing buzz in their ears.

If you sell beverages, your market will be interested only if they're thirsty. That's not necessarily pain, but it is discomfort. It registers low on the trauma scale, but it registers.

If you're a lawyer, I'm not calling you because everything's just hunky-dory in my life.

If you sell advice on making Websites profitable, you better get in touch with what it feels like to hear the wolf at the door.

Third, and last: What's the best way to *offer* your product?

It's never "just" price, or "just" terms.

If you want to get scientific about it, it's a complex stew of perceived opportunity, unconscious motivation, and a balancing act of raw greed versus the risks of appearing foolish or being ripped off.

That's why all copywriter "formulas" include guarantees (to counter the risk), third party endorsement (to counter the fear of feeling foolish), proof, credibility... and an offer constructed to deliver an *honest bargain*.

Psychologically, almost no prospect arrives in your world ready to buy without question or second thoughts.

Often -- even if what you offer is *exactly* what he needs, and he believes your claims -- he's still mad at you. Mad because you've forced him feel hope again, to believe that his life really can get better, that things can change and your product is just the right tonic at the right time...

... but he still has to pay, has to wait to see if his gamble pays off, and has to somehow *process* all this new information and all these fresh emotions in the meantime.

So, before you write a word of copy, get straight on these three things:

1. Consider what ails your prospect...
2. How your product fixes what's broken...
3. And how to offer everything in a way that dissolves all sense of risk.

Let's do a simple example.

Take a product that helps you quit smoking. Your prospect smokes, and wants to quit. So you start with a headline like this:

How To Stop Smoking

But *why* does he want to quit? What is it about smoking that is causing him pain?

Health? Could be.

If you dig a little bit, though, you'll discover that people who try to quit because of perceived health reasons... usually fail. There's something *else* going on.

For most smokers -- at least the ones who haven't yet been diagnosed with lung cancer -- the REAL discomfort doesn't begin *until* they stop smoking.

And it's not just the addiction part. If you talk with smokers, you'll discover their biggest fear about quitting... is gaining weight.

Yes, Virginia, people are vain.

So you put the puzzle of your prospect together. He may really, really "want" to quit...

... but he's freaked out about the discomfort of denying his addiction, of going through a drawn-out kick, and of gaining weight and falling into other addictions like chocolate and comfort foods.

If your product doesn't address those psychological needs, you better find out how to do it in other ways. You may need to add ingredients to your quit-smoking cocktail... or, at the very least, provide other materials that provide balm for every single fear your prospect has.

Could be special reports, DVDs, hypnosis tapes, whatever.

The experienced marketer knows when to dip into his bag of salesmanship tactics. It doesn't matter how many objections your prospect has.

It only matters how well you *counter* them.

In this simple example, we're gonna take the basic headline, and dress it up with elements that go straight for his deepest fears.

As in...

**How To Stop Smoking, Without
Weight Gain or Nicotine Cravings.
Begin your healthy recovery literally overnight, no
matter how long you've been smoking...**

And, to let him know you've also considered his need for a great offer...

Try it free -- with no obligation whatsoever!

This is not advanced, world-class headline writing.

But it is damn good *basic* ad-building material.

And you get there by performing simple tasks. If you don't understand the needs and fears of your prospect...

... find out.

In this case, it's not about quitting smoking -- it's about being a healthy and addiction-free, and not enduring any righteous suffering.

Know that, and you won't make the common mistake of selling the part about quitting so much.

Instead, you just address the psychological profile of your target prospect.

Most marketing teachers assume everyone has at least a drop of salesman's blood in them... and that assumption leaves behind all the engineers whose brains vapor-lock at the mention of the word "salesmanship".

So, if you need a *simpler* way to look at ad copy... consider how your product fixes what's broken in your prospect's life.

And counter every objection he has to trying it with easy-to-understand guarantees, basic proof, and a plain-talkin' deal that removes all risk.

In essence, get in touch with your own prior cluelessness.

How To Join John's Exclusive Mastermind Group.

John and his longtime biz partner Stan Dahl host an exclusive ongoing mastermind group called "The Platinum Mastermind Group". The group meets 4 times a year, and maintains an online members-only email group so members can interact, help each other in-between meetings, and take full advantage of the mastermind concept (brainstorming, networking, getting critiques, floating ideas, using each other's Rolodex's, etc.).

This group is the flagship group in John's world. He keeps it small, so everyone gets detailed, intense attention during each meeting. It's not your usual mastermind, either – rather, every member gets a Hot Seat total-focus hour centered on your chosen subject or subjects (which can be anything you feel you need to get group input or advice on... from reviewing new marketing programs, to creating new products, to entering new markets or starting a new biz entirely... and even how to better combine work and private life successfully).

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Chapter Fourteen:

Sex, Power, Status, Sex, Wealth, Sex...And... More Sex...

While saber-tooth tigers chew on your DNA, and you struggle to survive the Hollywood Trap to make a few honest bucks... the top online marketers cheer the death of long copy and old-school salesmanship.

So I'm getting comfortably numb, nursing a final Fat Tire amber ale and toasting off the chilly night air near a blazing fire pit on this weird rooftop bar...

... and I'm having a rather urgent conversation with a whip-smart smart-ass young marketer -- solving most (but not all) of the world's problems while one-upping each other with solidly-crafted gross-out witticisms...

... and I suddenly am struck with a revelation.

Wanna hear it?

It's this: **Things DON'T change.**

Wow.

Ummm.... okay, maybe I need to flesh it out a little for you.

First, allow me to explain the bar.

We're in San Diego at an invitation-only brainstorm/seminar, and my cerebral cortex is *taxed*. Thinking all day long and absorbing incoming data is *hard*, man.

So yeah, we all head to the hooch hut to repair our mood when the day is done. This hotel is bizarre beyond belief. It's called the "W" -- just the letter, nothing else.

And each room looks like it was decorated by an eight-year-old girl -- garish colors, Venetian blinds, hanging lava lamps, even a friggin' *chalkboard* on the wall.

With real chalk.

I don't know what to *do* in this wacky room.

So I'm spending most of my free time telling lies and trading stories in the bar.

Which has *sand* on the floor.

Sand.

Like we're at the beach, only we're several stories up, on a rooftop.

And it's January.

At night.

Brisk.

Fire pit, good.

A gaggle of the best marketing minds in the biz are huddled here, quaffing booze to stave off the cold and -- as I said -- earnestly solving most of the problems of the world.

It's a wild scene, and I'm enjoying myself immensely.

But this damn *revelation* won't stop nagging my brain. I really think I've hit on something important here.

Here's what I mean: One of the few documented advantages of getting older (besides finally knowing when that fresh beer in your hand really *is* the last one of the night) is the perspective you get from sheer experience.

And more and more in life, I'm realizing that *I've seen this movie before.*

In fact, that urgent conversation with the thirty-something marketer -- except for a few sundry technical details -- could easily have occurred thirty-five years ago in my college dorm.

I'm not saying the conversation was boring -- it was actually invigorating and wildly funny.

But it wasn't *unique*.

The literary references were ancient (and all great rooftop bar wit requires ancient literary references).

The rude asides about women were appropriately juvenile and sexist (unless a lady actually engaged us during the long chat -- especially the beleaguered waitress -- at which point we got even *more* rude and obnoxious) (while maintaining a base-level hilarity that absolved us of being officially ill-mannered).

And all insights into the slings and arrows of outrageous fortune were profound.

And honest.

And mostly true.

But not *unique*.

The accoutrements of life -- clothes, language, fads, heroes, villains, technology -- will always change dramatically.

And often.

But the BASICS of being human -- sense of humor, personality, deviousness -- will never, ever, *ever* change.

Not even a teeny tiny bit.

"Coolness" will always be sought, no matter how each new generation defines it. Hip, suave, swingin', beat, down, chill, groovy (well, maybe not groovy)...

The "quality" of a person -- while hard to explain -- will always be measured by others, tempered by events, and tested through trauma. (Taking the measure of a man of substance will never be easy, either -- just check out the thick biographies of Boswell, Franklin, Kerourac, or Twain.)

And the fundamentals of human interaction will always involve a complex emotional dance and juggling of status.

Everybody *wants* something.

Everybody *sells*.

And this was the fuel behind my revelation: The dance *never changes*.

Now, I have a degree in psychology, but I was quick in my career to see that good salesmen have a better grasp of human behavior than most academic-heavy shrinks.

The art of selling is seen as a *dark* art by many people... because the average Joe can't get his mind around the advanced aspects of the process.

And thank God for that. If everyone understood the subtleties and secrets, there would be no need for experts anymore.

For every major mystery solved, you know, some poor slob is suddenly out of a teaching job.

Anyway, this idea of an ancient "sales dance" has been on my mind since the brouhaha over this "Web 2.0" thing started brewing last year.

The blog-o-sphere and the copywriting chat rooms are ablaze with seemingly profound discussions of how much the Internet is *changing* the way we market stuff... but the discussions are all shallow as a mud puddle.

The younger guys seem especially vulnerable to the bright shiny goo-gaws of fresh technology... but even veteran marketers (who should know better) are starting to doubt their gut.

Upheavals in technology have always done this to humans.

It's totally understandable to believe the world has shifted under your feet, utterly and completely.

Because a lot of stuff DOES change, and dramatically.

The very nature of society and culture buckles, swings and explodes when the Technology Beast arrives... and each generation faced with this kind of violent change believes the ruckus *must* be also affecting human DNA.

But the view from where I sit is: **I don't think so.**

Electricity, airplanes, the Guttenberg press, fire, the internal combustion engine, Fender guitars, nano-technology and the wheel ALL sent shockwaves throughout civilization.

Feudalism became democracy, empires collapsed, the industrial revolution churned out luxury and crap, satellites and cable brought DSL into our homes... did I miss anything?

Of course I did.

Rock and roll, communism (no relation, no matter what John Birch told you), fast food... there have been convincing studies done that lay major societal and economic change at the feet of *washing and sewing machines* (which freed up entire days worth of time each week for women, setting up the equal rights movement).

The creation, breakdown and continued morphing of the nuclear family has never ceased.

Political power shifted from royalty to corporations, warfare became impersonal, and you can now chat about inconsequential things with people on the other side of the globe for just pennies per minute.

And it's hard to imagine today that, once upon a time, the wealth of the nation rested with adults... and literature, movies, and culture was aimed at folks over the age of twenty.

Today, teenagers control (unwittingly) the culture, because of unprecedented access to cash (which mainstream advertisers want). This explains the dumbing-down of Hollywood, since any movie that doesn't appeal to 14-year-old boys won't do Big Box Office opening weekend, and that is how the

studios define success.

It's like Alice in Wonderland out there.

All the tangible and most visible parts of the culture have been turned upside down, in a breathtakingly short period of time.

So, yeah, you can be excused for thinking that EVERYTHING is changing.

But it's not.

I often browbeat younger marketers over the limits of their experience. (That's how older guys level the playing field, browbeating.)

Still, I consider the fact I started my career on a beat-up typewriter (with a sticky "F" key)...

... yet was one of the first freelancers to own a PC (cobbled together from stolen IBM drives using pirated 5-1/4" floppies of DOS with an obscure word processing software that even the Smithsonian has forgotten about)...

... and was also a pioneer in blogging, podcasting, and selling on the Web...

... as evidence that I've *earned* my place at the head of the big damn Marketing Table.

But my experience *pales* next to my father, who was born in the Industrial Age...

... experienced the near-collapse of Western civilization during the world-wide Depression...

... first saw snow while digging a foxhole within sight of Nazi lines during the decisive Battle of the Bulge in Belgium...

... brought up a family in the Nuclear Age...

... watched the Space Age grow from rockets falling over on the launch pad to men *golfing* on the moon...

... and is now happily surfing the 'Net in the waning days of the Information Age.

Why, I gotta ask, aren't our heads *exploding*?

And that's part of my revelation.

All of these changes -- the technology, the shifts in power, the brain-numbing access to unrestricted knowledge and wealth -- are assaults from OUTSIDE our human shells.

As far as your DNA is concerned, however, deep *inside* you, the dread of nuclear bombs raining down isn't much different than your hairy ancestor's terror of saber-toothed tigers prowling nearby.

And surely you've noticed that the driving forces behind all this new technology is still war and sex.

Nothing new there.

Just as fire only progressed to central heating AFTER being used to burn down enemy villages and provide romantic lighting for hanky-panky in the cave long after the sun went down... so too has the military taken over NASA, and really awful soft-porn grown to dominate late-night cable TV.

Reminds me of back when the toll "900" numbers first came out around 1990. Our hot seat seminars were packed with entrepreneurs trying to find the sweet spot of need in society, so they could tailor their newly-purchased bank of 900 phone lines into cash-generating info machines.

They tried astrology.

Instant sports updates.

Weather.

For a brief time, it looked like psychic hotlines were gonna dominate (until the Feds shut them down).

In a relatively short time, however, the true destiny of toll 900 numbers became uncomfortably apparent: Sex hotlines.

Nothing else could make money.

Good grief.

Gary Halbert once got his hands on a list of the top-viewed online sites, which ran to several hundred pages.

How cool is *that*, I thought. We can get a good glimpse of what people are actually searching for on the Web.

You had to pay *extra* to separate the porn sites from the mainstream info and marketing sites, though.

So you ended up with two phonebook-sized lists, each pretty much the same length.

One, all the sites you wouldn't mind your mother discovering.

The other... well, I'm kinda sorry I now know too much about the twisted perversions of my fellow man. Creeps me out just sitting next to a stranger on a plane anymore, wondering if he's been downloading video from one of the many barnyard romance sites on that damn list.

Gives a whole new meaning to the term "animal husbandry".

Anyway...

This ALL gets back to the revelation I had, I swear.

The point is this: While things change *around* us... deep *inside*, we're still just greedy little bastards lusting after the same menu of things people have lusted after since the dawn of time.

Sex, power, status, sex, wealth, sex, and sex.

And good salesmen KNOW this.

While naïve not-so-good salesmen-wannabe's DON'T know this.

You don't have to slog your way through an entire career, as I've done, to get hip, either. I know plenty of young guns who figured this out early... and they're the guys raking it in online right now.

Humans have needs.

We WANT things. Often desperately enough to pay strangers for these things, without being able to actually touch, smell, heft or even see the actual thing we're buying.

We gotta suck up our paranoia and TRUST the guy selling it. Especially online.

And you know what the process of generating trust in order to sell is called:

Salesmanship.

And it hasn't changed even a little bit since the first caveman traded up to a cave with a better view for a slab of mastodon meat.

I'll give you *this*, in exchange for *that*.

I've posted a few musings on my blog about Web 2.0. I consider the whole thing pretty harmless -- the term "Web 2.0" is really just a way to give the Internet a public make-over, so investors who were freaked-out by the Dot-Com crash of 2000 will come back and infuse capital into online stocks again.

Yet, most of the craziness over Web 2.0 seems to be coming from the *creative* side.

Whole populations of marketers have decided that people won't read "long copy" anymore.

Cuz, you know, all this new Web technology has CHANGED things forever.

And people are getting really insistent on this, too. I got comments on my blog (and I've seen them echoed endlessly in the chat rooms) flatly stating that long copy is dead, dead, *dead*. (My friend Michel Fortin wrote a blog on this that started many of the chat room firestorms... but he *gets* it... and yet, somehow, people misread his point and have trotted off in another direction entirely.)

Okay.

Let me tell you a little secret here: I'm not publicly blogging about Web 2.0 and the health of long copy anymore...

... because I WANT those "death to long copy" yo-yo's to influence the competition.

You do, too.

You should get on your knees every night before bed and pray these guys win over everyone in sight.

Because they are preaching *anti*-salesmanship.

They are higher than kites on the delusion that, since the technology has changed so rapidly, the way humans behave must have *also* changed.

A common knee-jerk reaction.

Not unique.

But still dumb.

And guess what? Every single "A List" marketer I know *hasn't* moved away from long copy.

Sure, they're including video... podcasts... online radio... great volumes of content... better design, better metrics, better tracking, better *everything* now that all this new high-speed technology online has arrived.

But at the heart of their marketing... is a *damn good sales pitch*.

As long as it needs to be.

Back during the good ol' direct mail days, you could spot a rookie marketer by the way he talked about response rates.

If he obsessed on the percent of any list that "flipped" for his product (meaning, became a buyer)... well, then you knew you were dealing with someone who was weak on the concept.

Because the *percent* doesn't matter at all.

What matters is the *money* that comes in.

If a certain list responded at a .00001% rate... but that miniscule percent represented a million bucks in revenue, because your offer had multiple back-ends and lots of high-ticket stuff to sell... then you had a winner.

And another list, responding at a 10% clip, could be a dog, producing new customers whose lifetime value was below break-even.

It's the same with long copy. Most folks are looking at it the wrong way.

Long sales pitches don't work *because* they're long.

A boring sales pitch will fail no matter how long it is.

And sometimes -- like when you've teased your market sufficiently, and they're just waiting with baited breath for you to say "Okay, BUY!" -- then your closing sales pitch can be a quick note.

But that quick note wouldn't work without the advance waves of titillation and credibility-building that preceded it.

A killer sales pitch starts at the beginning...

... moves through all the steps necessary to sooth your prospect's fears, counter his objections, cement your credibility, whet his greed glands and rile him up with lust...

... and then closes with a call to action.

You can use multi-media to do this.

But it won't work just *because* you're using new technologies.

It will work *only* if you channel great salesmanship *through* the whiz-bang stuff.

A great salesman can still sell tons of product online, using NONE of the cutting edge technology available. Done right, an embarrassingly-simple sales letter slapped up using a share-ware template on a \$6 URL from GoDaddy with a generic link to PayPal... can still bring in a fortune.

To the right list, sold the right way.

Yet, a geek wizard can employ every single bright new tech-heavy feature viable... and not sell a *single* prospect, if he ignores the raw basics of good salesmanship.

The perfect storm, of course, is a new animal I call the Geek Salesman. Hip to the ancient sales dance (and a devoted student of human behavior)... *and* wired into the Grid.

The result: Damn good sales pitches, as long as they need to be, making use of appropriate new technology to keep a prospect hooked while you take him on a wild ride that ends only when he sits back with smoke coming out of his wallet.

And it doesn't have to be pretty to be effective.

Remember my analogy from the "Kick Ass Copywriting Secrets" manual: If Marilyn Monroe, in her prime, gave you her phone number...

... you wouldn't care if she scrawled it in smeared lipstick on a dirty bar napkin.

I feel like Marshall McLuhan here -- it's not the medium, it's the *message* that counts.

Are we clear on this?

Good.

Let's keep it a secret from the competition.

Notes From Babylon

Did you like my revelation?

I think it's genius. There's something comforting about the way life goes on regardless of the effort humans put into destroying it.

There's an old saying: If you're calm while everyone around you is panicking... then maybe you aren't fully aware of the situation.

And that's funny... but only to people who have an investment in being half-asleep zombies, bouncing through events in life like a ping pong ball.

Your standard-issue "go-to guy" considers being calm in the midst of chaos to be a GOOD THING. Something to strive for.

Because it means you *totally* understand the situation... including all the exit strategies, the probable outcomes of all obvious options, and how to stay psychologically frosty in a herd of freaked-out humans.

I've been in a crowded theater when someone yelled "fire" before. Instant chaos.

I grabbed the hand of the person with me, watched the direction of the human tide... and calmly

slipped out the exit near the stage, a way out completely ignored even by screaming people in the first rows.

We are both simple and complex creatures. Once you become aware of the ways people react to most things, you see *patterns* which are predictable. There will always be some variance in there, but overall a deep knowledge of human behavioral psychology will serve you well.

You'll be calm, even in the eye of the storm.

I bring this up, because one the very predictable ways people react to celebrity -- or the *whiff* of celebrity -- is to set aside all common sense, and dive into the myth that Hollywood possesses any wisdom at all.

Hint: It doesn't.

I hung out with a Tinsel Town crowd for many years when I lived at the beach near Los Angeles.

The "D" listers, I called them -- failed producers, waitress-actresses, screenwriters who'd never sold a script, all the flotsam and jetsam from the ragged edges of the Hollywood Dream.

I enjoyed the parties, and liked many of the characters I met...

... but there was no such thing as honest friendship in that crowd, since everyone was desperate to move up a notch...

... and if you couldn't help them get an audition, a meeting, or a contract, well, then you weren't of much value.

Plus, I was over thirty... so of course, even if I'd taken any of the sit-com jobs offered, I'd be a junior writer to a twenty-year-old producer.

Turning thirty was like entering exile in that town.

And no one cared that I was earning fabulous money in advertising. Horrifically untalented screenwriters, with not a sale nor a cent to their name, held more status than anyone in -- *yuck* -- advertising.

So I kept quiet about my career (and income), and just enjoyed the adventure of crashing six different parties all over the southland every Saturday night.

(Sites ranged from palatial art deco mansions off Sunset and converted lofts in the warehouse district, to UCLA dorm rooms and crumbling Malibu beach shanties.) (And you couldn't tell from the location who you might meet, either -- I sat next to Sean Penn at a dive bar in Venice, and first met the pre-famous Quentin Tarantino at a boring middle-class backyard bar-b-que in the Valley.)

I'm reminded of all this because several close colleagues of mine have recently revealed plans to do elaborate projects with video that smacked of... Hollywood influence.

Not good.

In two cases, I turned out to be prescient.

The prevalence of video online has attracted packs of people with impressive film-related credentials. Like producing episodes of TV shows, or doing second camera work in movies.

Technically, these guys can spin your head around... because they understand the issues of "quality presentation", lighting, audio, and framing shots.

What they fail to mention, however, is that they've never paid much attention to either the costs of high-end production... or the *effectiveness* of it for marketing purposes.

Every guy who's ever worked a camera in Hollywood has "blockbuster" mentality.

Meaning, his fantasy is to work with a bottomless budget that allows for endless takes, holding up shots for days to get the lighting just right, full crews with back-ups for makeup and catering, and never caring about who's paying for any of it.

They're a little hazy on the concept of using video for capitalistic purposes, though.

This, again, is mistaking the medium for the message.

Here's an example Michele found online, from an expensive-looking blog in a very hot niche market.

Just read this description, and try to keep your heart still:

Catch today's Cliqueisode to see Lisa volunteer in her community by teaching girls from her neighborhood how to make personal gifts for their parents.

And if you missed yesterday, be sure to watch as Lisa leaves her home office for meetings at the publishing headquarters of Creating Keepsakes, Simple Scrapbooks and Paper Crafts magazines.

Tomorrow, Lisa takes photos of her daughter, Brecken, for future scrapbooks. Thursday, you'll get the opportunity to see Lisa in her element when she finds time to scrapbook...

And on and on and on.

Lisa actually is a minor celebrity in this niche (scrapbooking).

But she's a celebrity because she appears on television shows as an expert... someone who can show you how to *do* cool things (if you consider scrapbooking cool, which millions of women do).

And, yes, this can be seen as an example of using personality to create a bond with your audience.

However, I've checked with women who are in this market... and they're definitely *underwhelmed* with the opportunity to watch Lisa drive from her home office to a meeting downtown.

This is a virus from Hollywood, infecting the vulnerable parts of the entrepreneurial world.

"Reality" TV is a hot commodity today, for many reasons. Cheap to produce, seems to appeal to certain audiences, and you don't have to deal with professional actors.

And some reality stuff CAN work to sell stuff. I know marketers who sold out "field trip" seminars that allowed you to see their actual offices, and sort of hang around to see how a successful business owner got through his day.

There's value in that.

I think it's kinda creepy, having people rooting through your in-box and pulling books from your shelves... but I see where it might appeal to some marketers eager to find out how more-successful guys pull it off.

But you gotta understand that allowing someone from *Hollywood* taking over this project would probably ruin it's chances to make money.

Hollywood creatures worship celebrity entertainers.

They focus on the entertainment part... and consider the process of converting entertainment into cash -- by selling ads or movie tickets, for example -- something mysterious and unknowable.

And vaguely unpleasant.

I stopped mentioning I was a copywriter at those LA parties because people regarded me as a leper. Zero status, with questionable integrity.

Whatever.

Let Hollywood be Hollywood, is my motto.

Just don't let the virus corrupt *your* marketing efforts.

Quick story: Back when I was partnering up with Halbert for the occasional project, he asked me to fly into Detroit and get some video of a special 20-year-old kid.

Why was he special?

Well, according to the National Enquirer, he'd lost over 700 pounds with a secret diet.

Halbert smelled gold.

The last time anyone had gotten an accurate idea of how much this kid had weighed at his heftiest state, they'd used a device used to weigh horses.

The kid clocked in at almost 900 pounds.

That's equal to six 150-pound people.

Six.

Of course, at 900 pounds he was pretty much maxed out -- even another wafer-thin mint would have blown apart his system. Six people can't live on a normal-sized heart.

Anyway, whatever diet he'd used was worth checking out. And having some footage of the kid, along with some testimonials from people who knew him, might yield the precious hook that could make this project a "go".

So I called up my old buddy D.C., who had the most experience with videotaping stuff of anyone I knew at the time.

He was from a Hollywood family -- his sister was a B-list actor married to a studio honcho -- and he even had several screen credits.

Including being one of the first apes in the blockbuster "Planet of the Apes".

And he'd been hanging out and partying with celebrities for decades. Personally knew huge stars (and could rattle off amazing stories for hours on end that kept you riveted).

Totally qualified to handle the camera, in my naïve view.

Anyway, we arrived at the Detroit Metro Airport late, because a storm had hit. As we walked toward the exit to go outside and get our rental car, a woman in a vast fur coat stopped us.

"Don't you boys have *coats*?" she gasped, clearly worried.

We shrugged. Of course we had coats -- we were wearing our finest black leather jackets, and I even had a sweater on, too.

In LA, we'd been sweltering.

Then we stepped out into the Michigan winter air.

Holy Mother of God.

I don't *ever* wanna be that cold again, ever.

Somehow, we found our rental car and made it to the hotel bar -- checking into our rooms could friggin' wait -- where we pounded coffee and whiskey and planned out the next day's schedule.

D.C. was *appalled* that I only wanted footage of the kid and the several people he was providing for testimonials.

Appalled.

He wanted to get "background" shots, of the school the kid had attended, of the house he grew up in, long montages of him shuffling along the streets of Motown, his town, the kinda town where dreams come true...

I realized with a shudder I'd made a horrible mistake. D.C. couldn't even begin to understand the concept of simple marketing footage, getting the testimonials down, interviewing the kid, getting the story. Basic fundamentals.

He was obsessed with "production quality", insisting on renting expensive lighting, hiring a sound guy, and of course we couldn't begin without a make-up artist...

"Dude," I said, evenly. "We don't have a budget for this. We don't *need* anything but raw video, using nothing but your little camcorder there. This isn't going on TV. We *may* -- key word there, 'may' -- use it in a direct response product... but only if we get the goods."

D.C. was having none of it, and the shoot went badly. He stole the car and used up half our film stock shooting empty streets and skylines, giddy with how good it was gonna look in the opening credits...

That was a lesson for me, and I've never forgotten it. Hollywood is about celebrity and entertainment. As marketers, we speak an entirely different language.

The diet project never took off, by the way. The kid had an interesting story, losing 700 pounds by walking and eating apples (true)... and he was undergoing multiple surgeries to remove the excess skin on his 150-pound frame, which he donated to burn clinics.

But a diet consisting of apples and walking isn't what the dieting market yearns for. It was an entertaining story... but it didn't *sell*.

Get More Carlton At The Blog...

If you're enjoying this book, and still have a jones for more...

... make sure you pop over to John's infamous blog at <http://www.john-carlton.com>, and sign in for email alerts on new posts. (There's a library's worth of archives on the site, too.)

The sign-in box is top right. Make sure you do this first, because you don't wanna miss what's coming up...

Chapter Fifteen: Storytelling 101...

Slugging it out over girls, surviving your high school reunion, and being the asshole with the camera for research purposes.

I'm in the middle of three weeks of road trips here... living in hotels, hurtling through the sky in steel tubes with wings sitting next to strangers, getting pawed and insulted by airport security goons whose last job was flipping hamburgers (and boy, do they ever *love* the new authority they have over people), and so on.

You know the drill.

It's good, of course, to get out of Dodge every now and then.

See new places. Learn new stuff. Taste intriguing and strange variations of tap water across the land.

Race little old ladies and thugs and weary businessmen through terminals, weaving and bopping and avoiding collisions like a punt returner.

Oh... and learn to weather the *downtime*.

Travel can be like combat, I hear. Long interminable spells of utter boredom... interspersed with unpredictable moments of sheer terror and shock.

You either learn to crave the terror and shock, because the boredom is making your brain curdle... or you find ways to engage your mind (while keeping an eye on your luggage and listening for gate changes on the squawk box intercom).

Lately, I've been taking my own advice... and observing some of the *stories* inside the swirl of activity around me, rather than allowing atrophy to settle in.

One of the primary rules I tell everyone who attend my seminars is this: The world is *roiling* with stories...

... yet most people refuse to see them.

And this is an *opening* for any writer with an ounce of awareness.

Learn to see the connective stories in your life, and in the lives around you. It will help you become a better writer overall... and a *killer* copywriter, specifically.

The homework exercise I give, the first day of a seminar, is to come back from lunch with a short tale of what happened to you or around you.

Most people are confused by this request. *Nothing* happened, they will insist. I had lunch at the deli. Went to my room to pee, and came back.

That's *it*. End of story.

Really?

Once I start digging, it becomes obvious that most people believe nothing *ever* happens to them... because they are so zoned out and oblivious, they MISS the action.

Who, for example, was in the elevator with you as you went up and then down from your room?

A young starry-eyed couple obviously on a honeymoon on one side, with a dour older couple behind them pointedly not speaking to each other?

A group of drunken Shriners giggling at bad inside jokes?

Kids soaking wet from a trip to the hotel pool, arguing about what happened to their room key now probably settling near the drain in the deep end?

Who was *in* there with you?

The world is crammed with stories. Alfred Hitchcock would glance at a broken-down motel on a desolate road, and the possibilities for a truly wicked plot line would bloom.

Jack Kerouac hitchhiked across America eating apple pie, drinking with disillusioned intellectuals and howling at the moon... and realized a good tale was engulfing him day by day.

I'm not in that company... but heck. I overheard a guy talk about being so broke he had just a single nickel left after paying a cover charge and buying a beer in a skinhead bar...

... and I immediately came up with ad copy for a self-defense course that ran for years, bringing in a *fortune*. (I forced the client to paste a nickel to the first page of the direct mail letter version, because that's what triggered the whole plot.)

And long ago, I learned to listen discretely in elevators.

Recently, in an Atlanta luxury hotel, two demure older ladies in their Sunday finest were gossiping -- I swear -- about what must have been a *swinger's party* in Savannah the previous week. (They thought the hostess was extremely tacky for not freshening up her Brazilian wax job before the soiree.) (Don't scoff -- I'm pretty sure I heard them correctly.)

But that's too easy.

In another elevator, in another city, I shared a twenty-floor ride with a large biker who seemed lost in thought... while a single tear bubbled from his left eye and slowly wound its way through the thick foliage of his beard.

I have no idea what his story was.

But there WAS a story there, and a very intriguing one, too... had I cared to dig deeper. If I had not been aware, it would have just been another ho-hum elevator ride.

What does any of this have to do with marketing and advertising?

Everything... once you realize the crucial job that *storytelling* has to do with bonding and credentializing and proving your promises.

As humans, we are hard-wired to crave stories.

Good stories, not boring ones with no point.

And in advertising, a good story will MAKE your point with stunning power.

If you're a writer (or want to become one), it's time to start honing your observational chops.

And the sharpening never ends -- in fact, it is a basic *requirement* of becoming a good copywriter to LOVE stories, and to indulge in observation eagerly whenever you can.

So... let's take just one example. From my most recent trip.

Here we go: While I was lounging in the comfy plastic torture chairs Delta provides exhausted travelers, waiting for yet another delayed flight to make its grand arrival like a spoiled debutante...

...I leisurely allowed the stories around me unwind and maybe trigger some Big Thoughts about marketing and living life well.

Near the bar, I noticed a young woman, barely old enough to drink and barely over her personal limit for losing inhibitions...

... okay, she looked fairly plastered...

... step away from her friends and lock her gaze on something across the room.

Her look was feral, like a predator zeroing in on prey. Her head lowered just a tad, her mouth went slack and hungry, and her eyelids narrowed like blinders to keep all extraneous activity blocked.

This girl was *focused*, barely breathing.

Her prey was a young man standing with friends on the other side of the room. And though he'd been facing away from her when she first noticed him, he felt her stare instinctively, and was stealing glances her way, coyly acknowledging her existence, but not locking eyes.

He was flirting.

She, however, was *carpet bombing* him with mating signals that would embarrass a baboon in heat.

A couple of light beers (okay, and maybe a shot of Jagermeister, I don't know), and she was a conduit for jungle-quality primal lust.

Cool, I thought. Nice to see the younger generation has its priorities straight.

On a deeper level, though, I was whisked away back to my own youth. I was both fortunate, and *unfortunate*, enough to have experienced that kind of raw sexual conquest with a few young women...

... and while I may not remember my grade point average in college, I can testify to the *exact* visceral pings and zings and zowies of sinking into the emotional bath of young love.

I don't know *all* the ways that story across the hall, in that B Terminal bar, could play out... but I know of at least a dozen variations, cuz I lived them.

The main theme of the story never changes:

Hormones cause turbulence.

That turbulence can be good... or bad... or, as it was in most of my personal cases, it can be good/bad/good/bad/good/bad/good... and then really, really, *really* BAD.

And then good again.

Really good.

And on and on, like some soap opera with no end in sight. Or a perpetual roller coaster in la la land.

Yet there *was* an end to it all, and looking back, it happened fairly quickly.

I grew up, is what happened. And while I never lost interest in love, I heaved a sigh of relief as my brain reclaimed control from my loins.

Those unfiltered hormone dumps can *kill* you.

In fact, the only time I was knocked out in a fight was over a girl, back in high school. Saw stars and

everything, and landed hard on my butt after floating through the air for what seemed like hours.

I still have the scar where my lip was split open.

But I don't even remember the girl's name, let alone what she looked like. Or what was so frigging urgent about the situation that I suddenly needed to slug it out with another guy.

Neither of us ever saw the girl again.

I know this, because the other guy and I became bosom buddies (and he even taught me a few things about putting up my dukes, after helping me up off the pavement and giving me a ride home).

I think she wandered off with yet another guy that night.

Hormones.

Anyway, all of this welled up in my head in seconds, just catching a glance at the scene in the airport bar across from the gate where I was slouching in a seat, waiting for a plane.

And no, I don't know how that particular story played out.

They flirted, there seemed to be a boyfriend or wannabe boyfriend who applied some interference, and the young prey seemed, ultimately, less interested in going further with the girl than with hanging with his friends.

Loser.

But I was long gone by that time, lost in my own head. And not just with memories (which I won't bore you with).

With... and this is proof I've gone over the edge here... ways to *use* all this observation in writing copy.

Okay, so I'm a loser, too.

Actually, I mostly *like* the decrease in raw hormone dumps in my middle-aged system. I am calmer... less inclined to get in fights or wander into clearly dangerous situations with nothing more than a crooked grin and a vague belief this could be fun if I don't get killed first...

... and I kinda enjoy *translating* the stories I see around me, rather than *living* them all the time.

I still wanna live stories, of course.

But my main passion now is *writing this stuff down*.

As a copywriter, I have an amazing opportunity to use almost every story I discover in my sales pitches... because they work like *magic* to engage readers and move the sales process along on greased grooves.

And it's all *about* "translation", too.

It's about observing life, and *bringing* your observations to your reader in ways that breathe reality and adventure into everything you're trying to say to him.

Most people live in gray worlds devoid of stories, because they are too self-contained and unaware to see the action swirling around them.

They are bored, sad to have missed out on the party, and convinced all hope for a better life is lost.

Then YOU arrive... and *yeah!*... suddenly here are tales to get their blood moving and their imagination fired up and their dreams rekindled.

That's what good writers do. Translate the world *back* to the great mass of zombies struggling in shackles of their own making.

Go to your next high school reunion.

I'm serious.

Go -- even if graduation was a few years ago and you hated everything about the experience -- and reminisce with your classmates.

Here is what you will find (and I know this because, as part of my lifelong learning process, I have *forced* myself to go to every reunion put on by my hard-scrabble school):

By the tenth reunion, people you considered friends -- but who you lost touch with -- will barely remember you.

The kids who were bouncing off the walls with energy before, are now mostly sodden blobs of regret and despair.

And for most... the hormonal bloom has long since dissipated into faint wisps of barely-registered yearning.

Yikes.

Now, this isn't across the board. At my own tenth, half the crowd was still partying like it was 1999 (though it was actually 1980, and Prince was what, still in high school himself?), and I personally know of at least two marriages that blew up over what happened that night.

But the *other* half of the crowd was zombie-city. There was that creepy feeling you get when you're around people who have just *given up* -- as if they'd had the life literally squeezed out of them.

It was even more pronounced at the next reunion.

Mind you, I cheated a little bit to survive these events.

I am still great friends with half a dozen of my old high school crowd... and we all approach these reunions the way you might prepare for seeing a great new horror movie with pals who share your sick and twisted love of all things demented and gory.

You leave the significant others at home... you get rooms at the hotel... and you get really, really drunk before arriving to pick up your name badge (always plastered with your fetid photo from the yearbook).

Last time, I really got into it. I even brought a video camera, and was shameless... absolutely *shameless*... about asking people *intimate* questions about their high school experiences.

And then filming their answers.

At first, everyone was reticent, shy and suspicious.

Then they, too, got roaring drunk... and I finally found out who (a decade earlier) had crushes on who, who did what to who under the bleachers, and who was still pissed at whoever it was who did or did not ask them to the prom.

It was shocking, amazing, and the most fabulous raw evil fun I've had in years.

I felt like Ken Burns.

And, like a good documentary film-maker, here's the secret to getting the best stories: **You ask *pointed* questions.**

Open-ended questions, such as "what was high school like for you", are useless.

You gotta roll up your sleeves, and get down in the mud with everyone's Id.

I won't go into details here -- reputations are at stake, after all -- but that video I took is priceless. Once I got people talking, they actually *fought* to get camera time.

And once I got a couple of the former Social In-Crowd hierarchy to reveal some truly juicy, legendary secrets... the rest of the crowd lined up to rat out everyone they knew.

The funny thing is... I had no intention of ever letting anyone outside of my little coterie of friends *see* this video.

I was just goofing around, playing at being "the asshole with the video camera."

And what I discovered reinforced every theory I have about stories, life experience, and sales copy.

As much as I'm probably going to hell for getting folks to divulge intimate information like that... you must also realize that for many attendees, that was one of the most fun and *invigorating* nights of their life.

Most people don't reminisce. Or if they do, they don't do it well.

Memory gets hazy. Ill-told stories don't get listened to.

People get bored...

... they forget what it was like to feel a Class-4 hormone dump while staring at Suzy Creamcheese's ponytail during algebra...

... and to fight off the loneliness and isolation of adulthood, they soak up way too much television and booze and fatty food.

It doesn't *have* to be this way, kids.

Life isn't a ride that's kinda exciting for a while, and then mellows out until you take one last yawn and die.

Not if you're paying attention.

Life is a banquet... and most poor suckers are starving to death.

As a marketer, that's your opening.

BE that go-to-guy who has shaken himself awake, and help *translate* the ongoing stories of life well-lived to your prospects out there who are desperate for any sign of honest adventure.

A great sales message is a promise of a better life, another shot at the brass ring, once more into the breach and damn the torpedoes.

Spotting that moment of pre-rutting behavior in that airport bar made my day, and I'm still buzzing with the memories and observations it brought up.

And I'm smiling.

Life is good at the banquet.

Need More Carlton Advice?

His first course for marketers is a transformational thrill-ride you can devour in a weekend...

... yet, it will completely arm you with the simple-yet-brutally-effective advertising chops required to slaughter your competition and dominate your niche as quickly as possible.

It's called "Kick-Ass Copywriting Secrets of a Marketing Rebel"... and you cannot even imagine yet how much advanced business know-how and specific selling tactics this easy-to-absorb course short-cuts for you.

This is what to do next, and how to do it for maximum results... from creating your first product, to finding and persuading your first mob of deliriously-happy customers, to quickly establishing yourself as the most dangerously-good competitor in your niche.

When you're ready, zip over to John's notorious blog at <http://www.john-carlton.com> and click on the "Kick-Ass Copywriting Secrets" icon in the right hand column (under "Stuff To Buy").

Your satisfaction is, of course, guaranteed. You don't risk anything by seeing what's up.

This is, after all, the same course that sits on so many successful entrepreneurs' desks, dog-eared and well-used as the main resource guide for creating ads and fortifying all marketing channels.

Chapter Sixteen: Grief and Heat...

What's required to enter the hottest markets successfully, why celebrity endorsements often fail to deliver sales, and the single best piece of advertising advice ever given.

Okay, gather round, people. Important stuff today. Quiet down.

We're going to discuss pornography.

Hah. Thought that might interest you.

And, believe it or not, there's a critical lesson in this story for all marketers. I call this my "**Grief and Heat**" lecture.

So let's get going.

First -- here are my credentials as an expert on porn: I saw my first explicit flick way back in the Stone Age, in college.

On campus.

At a big lecture hall.

With half the administration and teaching staff in the packed audience.

And all the girls from my co-ed dorm were taking *notes*.

That's how weird and exciting it was to attend a California university in the early '70s. Tolerant, slightly-whacked profs and sex-positive feminists.

God, I miss those days.

Anyway, the movie was "Deep Throat". I'm sure you've heard of it. Linda Lovelace with a peculiar anatomical plot device. Introduced mainstream America to "piston" camera angles and new terms like "money shot".

Bit of a ruckus outside the hall from a handful of pissed-off Puritans, but not a peep in the newspapers about it. Just another day in academia.

In the early '80s, a friend gave me his impressive stash of triple-X videos. He was getting married, and needed to divest his closet of the treasure, but just couldn't bring himself to throw any of it in the dumpster. Guys are like that about porn. He had tears in his eyes as he walked away to his new life

of marital bliss, minus “Debbie Does Dallas”. (He’s still married, by the way.)

So I’ve seen nearly all the “classic” porn tapes. You saw the movie “Boogie Nights”, about the hard-core scene in Los Angeles circa late-seventies/early eighties? The industry had just moved from grainy shot-on-the-fly shorts using prostitutes, to actual movies with scripts and sound-stages and make-up artists and everything. Including starlets who actively sought out such careers. This was all pre-AIDS, and I gotta tell you -- the people in these flicks actually seem to be having fun.

In the early ‘90s, Gary Halbert and I were sitting around Miami Beach one afternoon, going over various new projects that seemed like good ideas at the time. The Better Sex video series was in full bloom -- Americans were shelling out *millions* for a couple of cheesy tapes where the action was routinely interrupted by dour doctors in lab coats mumbling about the scientific aspects of, say, good oral sex.

Gary and I thought we could do better. We were, of course, grateful to the Better Sex people for blazing the trail.

But we thought we could do better.

And this is where the “Grief and Heat” part of the newsletter begins. Pay attention.

First off, I *know* I could create better sex-info products than the insulting schlock being pumped out these days.

I don’t even care to try, but I could.

This is not an empty boast. I have *memories* that are more explicit and more fun than any of the scripted crap you see on late-night cable (or in the magazines like Cosmo staring at you from the check-out line at your grocery).

Look -- after spending years hanging out with peripheral Hollywood crowds, there’s no question left in my mind why regular movies are so bad these days. The people making them have almost *no real life experience* at all, and are definitely not students of human nature. The execs at many studios are barely past puberty, and their only reference point is other movies.

Result: Garbage in, garbage out.

It’s the same with the porn industry. The people who create it, for the most part, have unhealthy appetites. The “sex” in current porn is redundant, faked, and arranged for the camera.

It’s also boring. (Okay, I admit I haven’t watched much brand-new hard-core... but I have friends who are connoisseurs, and they assure me that nothing’s changed.)

However... as with many things in life and marketing... quality has absolutely zero relevance to profit. Just as awful Hollywood blockbusters are setting new box office records every month, so is

the gawd-awful porn industry *booming*.

There are now over 300,000 naughty websites (and counting), up from just 22,000 in 1997.

About 211 new hard-core videos are created in the U.S. every *week*, and *rentals* of the stuff has mushroomed to nearly a billion dollars a year. (I have trouble understanding how anyone can get up the nerve to rent “Valley of the Big Breasted Vixens III” at the local video store -- with Ozzie and Harriett and the kids behind them waiting to check out “The Little Mermaid” -- but apparently they’re doing it in droves.)

(And do they *steam-clean* those videos after they’re returned?)

All right... back to Miami Beach.

Halbert and I just know we can get in on the mainstream part of the action, and put together an incredibly good educational sex video... which we would then sell by the ton with superior marketing.

Two world-class marketers, strolling into the Valley of Death.

My God, we were naïve.

To make a long (and rather lurid) story short... we quickly put together the basics of the project.

We had our respected psychologist with a truly stunning amount of information about sexual secrets most people never discover. (Yes, even studs like you.) Amazing stuff, like giving a woman a continuous orgasm for three straight days -- time out for showers and snacks, I seem to recall -- and clever ways for men to regain youthful levels of vim and vigor at any age.

We had the script together, we had the killer ad campaign mapped out, and I personally sank some significant money into the production. We were on a mission to educate America and make the world safe for healthy, exciting sex again.

It all seemed like a slam dunk.

Instead, it turned into my first lesson in “Grief and Heat”. I never saw a dime for my trouble.

Here’s what happened: First, we attempted to contract for actors through legitimate channels. No go. Agents hung up on us.

So, after some desperate bribing and string-pulling, we were hustled down the shady paths of the “real” porn industry (dealing with some truly creepy characters) until we found a husband/wife team willing to do the shoot for a stiff price (so to speak).

I won’t use their names... but she later rose to such fame that 60 Minutes and even the O’Reilly Factor

did short bits on her. And she's regularly on HBO.

This is painful for me to remember.

The shoot was an unmitigated disaster. Turns out that porn actors are a little light in the... well... *acting* thing. And the big scientific words our shrink used seemed to baffle them.

Plus, they had their own ideas about getting it on, and resisted anything new. Which, of course, was what our project was all about in the first place. Still, we got enough footage to put a product together to at least test in the market.

Or so we thought.

First, the guy who had the raw master tape disappeared on us for awhile. Then, stuff got lost in editing. No one seemed to know where the release contracts had ended up. An edit job that should have taken a week stretched to over a month, then longer.

Just the fact the material was about sex seemed to be making everyone *insane*. None of this would have happened if we were doing a video about farming techniques.

Meanwhile, I was hemorrhaging money paying for lead generation ads in magazines. Because of the nature of the material (yes, even though it was educational and serious), the mags *buried* the ads.

Still, they pulled well. But the people we used to take the phone calls -- and there were a *lot* of phone calls -- put the names into *shoe boxes*... and then *lost* them. Again, they just went bonkers because it had to do with sex. (It's a good thing these were just requests for info, and not actual orders.)

And this was all before we were briefed on the myriad ways we might *accidentally* break some repressed state's law and get thrown in the pokey. Just for daring to broach a subject that was on everybody's mind and a normal, regular part of most people's lives.

How *dare* us.

The full story goes on for a bit longer, and then ends in total chaos and acrimony and butchered bank accounts. Gary and I have long since licked our respective wounds and put the episode behind us... but the memory of the disaster is still vivid enough to make me wince.

So **here is the lesson:** While there is, indeed, a fortune to be made in this market...

... the *grief and heat* you must endure is overwhelming for most folks.

This explains why, even while porn is now pretty much accepted in American culture, the only people who get deeply involved with it aren't the sort you'd like to have over for tea. Their main credential is *being able to take the heat*.

Did I say porn was accepted now? Let's rephrase that.

In much of the country, it's no longer a big deal.

However, in *other* parts of the country, it is still very much a big deal. They will crucify you for your efforts. In fact, for many influential folks, it's the *main event* in the ongoing Battle Between Good and Evil.

There are several states where no one will ship sex-related videos, under any circumstances. Because officials there will try to lock you in the stockade for public mocking.

Politicians can get elected *just* by opposing porn (even when their constituents consume it by the truck-load), and district attorneys can get an instant career boost by prosecuting producers.

They can't define it, but like the Supreme Court, they know it when they see it. So don't even think about violating their vague, First Amendment-insulting laws.

You naughty, naughty person, you.

This is why the industry is concentrated in certain tolerant cities (like LA, where famous porn starlets will be in line with you at the local Starbucks). And it's why the main players remain a small, tight-lipped and occasionally mean little clique. They do NOT enjoy competition. And they have an extremely nervous stand-off going on with The Man.

They also do not care a whit what anyone else thinks about them.

For me, even as I was explaining to friends about the *educational* sex video we were trying to get off the ground... they would nearly always stop listening after the words "sex video" and ask if I wasn't afraid of going straight to hell (or some similar kind of reproach).

So here's the formula for many of the hottest markets out there: In general, the more *money* involved, the more opportunistic *scrutiny* you can expect from official quarters. (This is the "heat".)

And, the closer the *subject matter* is to our nervous Freudian core, the more you will be a target for moral outrage and just plain nutty behavior on everyone's part. ("Grief".)

The project *can* be done, and make oodles of money and overcome all obstacles. Heck, the local sex shops in many cities are now regular Mom 'n' Pop type businesses.

But, in many ways, it's like owning the liquor store in the bad part of town. Sure, the cash register is gonna *ka-ching* all night long. But you're also going to get robbed a lot. By nasty, glass-eyed punks with weapons.

You know those joints that cash checks for a fee? I once met a guy who had a string of them. He told

me they operated off the statistical knowledge that only a certain percentage of the checks would be bad. So they charged high fees to everyone to offset that.

His grief was living with the fact that 15% of the incoming checkage would bounce.

The *heat* came from social do-gooders and muck-raking journalists, who assumed he must be a slimy crime boss taking advantage of people. (He wasn't. He was, in fact, fulfilling a need in a community where banks refused to tread.)

I am not a thin-skinned guy. I've been in the front-line trenches too long to be skittish about anything.

But I do *not* have thick enough skin to weather the heat and grief of many super-lucrative markets. I've been involved in diet campaigns that invited the wrath of low-rent investigative television shows. (Interesting revelation: They will *lie* to make their shows more interesting. And there's nothing you can do about it.)

And I've been on the butt-end of steely, reproachful looks from all sorts of officials and agents and politically-correct types just for being a good copywriter.

Heck, my *golf* ads cause my clients grief from outraged golfers. But that's grief you can laugh about. It's when you get that call from an alphabet agency (SEC, FDA, FBI, SPCA, etc.) that causes the gut-check.

And rest assured -- when you hit it big, you *will* be a target. I won't go into it here... but there are predatory lawyers out there who search for business owners with money. That's their *only* criteria: Does he have money?

And when they find you, they go after you.

In their world, that money in your bank account righteously belongs to *them*.

And right *behind* Mr. Scumbag Lawyer will be a line of con artists, scamsters, investment brokers and garden-variety blackmailers. All with your freshly-stuffed portfolio in their sights.

So be aware of what you're getting into. I see guys wandering blithely into the diet game, or the financial arena, or some other market where they will be playing alongside sharks and federal agents. And they are *completely ignorant of the risks*.

That's not good. Don't walk into any market blind. Check out the other players in the sandbox first. Like I said... it *can* be done. Every market in the world needs new product. We are hard-wired for sex, we are emotionally starved for popularity, we will suffer to get thin and rich.

Just don't start believing *no one else has noticed* when you discover a market that forks over cash in bundles for the right promise.

The good people in your life will congratulate you on your success.

Everyone else will line up to shovel out the grief and heat. So stay frosty.

Tales From The Vice Squad

I have another riff on the above subject I want to share with you. It's about "outrage".

I'm old enough now to have lived through multiple cycles of permissiveness and repression in this country. Like clockwork, the pendulum swings far to the left, then comes back hard to the right. It's inevitable, and nothing you do, say, think or feel has any effect on it.

After the carnage of World War One, moral outrage brought us Prohibition. Which brought out the *amoral* backlash of the flappers during the Roaring Twenties (where sin was flaunted and revered). The country paid for its excess during the Great Depression, and the dance continued, back and forth.

Sexual repression in the fifties, sexual revolution in the sixties. Disco in the seventies, the Reagan revolution in the eighties. Bush, Clinton. Clinton, Bush.

The *one* thing you can bet on... is that the loudest moralists will be shown up as hypocrites, and the brashest libertines will be forced to admit they went too far.

As a clueless sophomore in high school, I was part of an impromptu march to the local newspaper with my mother and a handful of other outraged students and parents. The rag had run a story quoting a girl who insisted "all" the kids at my school were having sex and partying hardy.

How *dare* they even imply such a thing! We motored on down to the paper's offices, and promptly cancelled our subscriptions, demanding apologies and grovelling from the editor. (We got neither.)

Trouble was... the story turned out to be mostly *true*. I was one of the nerds who were simply out of the loop at school. The party was going on behind my back. (I made up for lost time soon after.)

Our outrage was impotent, anyway. The overall circulation of the paper *increased* as the story grew, and everyone who had cancelled their subs quietly re-subscribed.

It was, after all, the only paper in town.

This illustrated the stark contrast of our "idealized" lives, versus our "tabloid" lives. We all like to think of ourselves as heroes, as good, moral people always doing the right thing. And we want to pretend our town is Pleasantville, and everyone is behaving behind the pulled curtains.

As a marketer, we don't get to live with rose-colored glasses. You must view your customer base as it is... not how you *wish* it to be.

This is a *huge* advantage, once you understand the ramifications. While your competition continues to

put consumers on a stupid pedestal, insisting they are pure as driven snow... you will be busy *bonding* with your customers, as one real person to another.

You know, I'm gonna get some grief for even daring to write about pornography here.

And I guarantee you, many of the loudest critics will be people hiding some nasty perversions in their closet. They will threaten to boycott me, maybe start some trash-talk, and even try to set me straight. As a favor. To save my soul.

Whatever. Many people need their teachers to be above the fray. And I'm not. One of the joys of getting neck-deep in human behavioral psychology... is recognizing *yourself*.

We're all in the same fix. And we can choose to hang together, or hang separately. No one gets out of this world unscathed.

And the smart marketer wouldn't have it any other way.

How-To Department

Okay, enough about the tawdry side of human behavior. Let's move on to tidier pastures.

Did you know the inventor of the “**celebrity endorsement**” was a psychologist named Watson, who took a gig at the J. Walter Thompson advertising agency over seventy years ago, after *failing* as a pre-Dr. Spock child rearing expert?

You didn't know that? Well, now you do.

Since that time, movie stars, astronauts and athletes have been hawking product like nobody's business. Most of the time, it doesn't work very well. Guys like Halbert, however, have proved over and over again that you *can* use even minor, nearly unknown “celebrities” to get amazing results... *if you do it right*.

And I'm all for celebrity endorsements -- if they're inexpensive, and they don't interfere with the marketing. I've talked before about the “Primadonna Syndrome” -- where any talent you highlight in your marketing will eventually believe *he's* the reason for the success of the campaign.

To prevent this, you should strive to *never* let talent have a piece of the profit, or a say in the marketing. You will pay for it if you do.

But this is part of *savvy* marketing.

In the rest of the advertising world -- where people aren't so savvy -- there exists a belief that the “bigger” the celebrity doing the endorsing, the bigger the “splash” of the campaign.

Horseshit.

Would you run out and buy a certain car just because Marlon Brando did a commercial for it? Of course not. To be fair, I *might* give a second look to any product Jack Nicholson pitched... but it wouldn't flip me automatically. (By the way -- I once partied with Jack. Really. I was at one table with my "D-list" friends, and he was right behind us, drinking with Sean Penn. Technically, I suppose, we weren't partying "together"... but we were sharing the same oxygen.)

Celebrities have some allure, it's true. My father once decided to use a certain insurance company solely because one of his favorite actors was pitching for it.

And he was later completely disillusioned of the whole celebrity thing when a news story came out that the actor had been drunk during the commercial shoot, and couldn't even remember the name of the company. But, hey, it worked initially.

And that's why you see so many celebrity endorsements in major Madison Avenue campaigns. In fact, if they could, they would get God to pitch for toilet paper. And honestly believe that's all they needed for a successful ad.

Well, guess what?

There's something so much *more* powerful than having a celebrity as your skill...

... that I will *give* you God as your celebrity...

... and *still* beat the pants off you in the marketplace.

It's called "**positioning**".

There are three kinds of positioning. The first one was illustrated to me late one sultry evening in a 7-11 store outside Sacramento. The Coca-Cola guy was busy taking all the six-packs of Pepsi off the middle shelf, and pushing them far back in the bottom shelf.

And replacing them on the center shelf with sixers of Coke.

In retail, shelf position is everything. Location, location, location. Go into your local supermarket, and check out where the Cheerios are, the Snapple sits, the Charmin resides.

Eye level. And it's not by accident. The top companies learned long ago that no matter how much they spent in advertising, their total numbers would only go up or down a few percentage points.

But -- secure *eye-level shelf* position in the supermarket... and, bingo, *major* sales hit.

They're willing to pay for that shelf position. And they will fight you for it.

The second kind of positioning is where your ad appears. In magazines, you want to be in the front of

the book. The first half for sure... the first quarter of the rag is even better.

In women's publications like Vogue, the first dozen or so pages up front are the most coveted -- and highly priced -- real estate in the mag. We're talking tens of thousands of extra dollars here.

So I'm always perplexed why companies shell out for those pages, and then run vapid photos of anorexic junkies that don't even highlight the product. And hide their logo, to boot. But that's a rant for another time.

I have several clients who run two-page ads I've written for them in certain high-profile publications. The price for a single full-page ad would take your breath away, and you have to *double* that shock to run the whole thing.

Yet, the major battle they wage with the sales rep is not the total price of the ad. It's the *position* of the ad inside the magazine. Because they know, from experience, that the best ad in the world can die from under-exposure if buried in the back pages. And thrive beyond the dreams of avarice if presented in the front. It's the equivalent of "eye level" shelf position.

Finally... there's a third kind of positioning. It's how you position your product in the reader's *mind*, through your copy.

I want the reader to think about the product -- to position it in his brain -- in three very distinct ways:

4. I want him to clearly see that this product is **necessary** in his life...
5. I want him to feel an almost desperate **urgency**, where he must act right away or lose out forever...
6. And... I want him to see that what is offered is of such high **value**, he would be a *fool* not to order immediately and without delay.

So you can have your big-name celebrity. I'll gladly give you that advantage in any campaign. Because it's completely irrelevant. With a great sales pitch, and great positioning, a celebrity *may* boost response. Without those elements, you're just running an empty ad.

Salesmanship 101

All right, all right. Let's go back to sexy marketing tactics for a little longer.

How's about I reveal to you the truly sexy secret of **completing the sale**?

Most rookies think the sale is over at the "climax" of the process. In a sales letter, the "foreplay" is all the copy leading up to the actual pitch. I'm a huge advocate of aggressive foreplay, too. You want your reader so hot and bothered, he won't put your ad down to leave a burning house.

And when you get good at that -- good at forcing the reader to *lose himself* in your copy, and getting his greed glands quivering with desire -- it's relatively easy to complete the act. Do you want it? Do you really, *really* want it? Well, just pick up the phone, call this number, and have your credit card ready. That's all you need to do...

I like to think of the process as teasing a nearly immobile lump of couch potato into action.

The hardest part is getting it to move at all. Steer it toward the phone, keeping the heat up all the way. When he finally puts the phone down, having placed his order, he should feel *exhausted*. He has just spent money on something he didn't even realize he wanted ten minutes ago.

The "orgasm" of the sales process has just been accomplished. Whew.

But veterans know the act ain't *truly* over until you do a little cuddling and cooing first. For many customers, that act of ordering is as far as they will go. They will shelve the product when it arrives...

... or, worse, *return it* in a fit of lover's remorse.

Your job is not to let that happen. If you can't get the product into their hands very quickly (say, a matter of days in the mail or -- with downloadable materials -- a matter of minutes), then you should seriously consider dropping them a "stick letter" first.

This letter, or email, is intended to make the sale "stick". You *reinforce* their decision to buy, and rekindle the fire under their ass. Remind them how exciting their life is about to get, how much money is now headed their way, what grand adventures await.

In other words... do a little *cuddling*, for God's sake. They've just heard you out, gotten deeply involved in your world, and *sent you money*. They've trusted you more than they trust some of their closest friends.

Stay involved with them. Because the deal ain't over until the check or credit card clears the bank.

Far too many marketers are ungentlemanly cads. They high-five each other after the order is taken, and promptly move on to the next conquest.

Big mistake.

That first order from your new customer is the *initial round* only. Your goal is to make them a customer for *life* -- so you continue the bonding, reinforce their buying decision, and make them feel welcome, safe and warm in your arms.

And sure, you're doing all that with your other customers, too.

But as far as each individual knows, *they* are the only apple in your eye.

Coaches Corner

Good grief, that was a shameless little exercise in gratuitously sexualizing some otherwise innocent subject matter, wasn't it?

I am so good at that, it scares me sometimes.

Well, while you're busy having a smoke, I'll just finish this chapter by letting you in on **“the best piece of copywriting advice I ever got.”**

It came from Halbert, of course. Credit where credit is due.

I had been struggling for days on a certain sales letter. And, as is often the case, when you struggle, you tend to *complicate* things. I see this in the pieces I critique all the time.

In my case, I was taking a very basic, simple sales proposition...

... and twisting it into a Byzantine maze that would *lose* the average reader before the end of page one.

My brain was hopelessly clouded. My vision was stunted, seeing only trees and no forest. Every revision I did only made things worse.

As a favor, Gary and I often exchange copy we're working on to critique. We're brutal, too. We've made each other cry.

But the advice is nearly always right on target.

That's the advantage of having a good copywriter in your Rolodex -- because it's just so freakin' easy to get lost in the pitch.

And a good writer can sober you up in a matter of minutes.

What's more, in most cases, the solution is *standing right behind you*. Just barely out of sight.

I have never forgotten the advice Gary gave me that one time. It had nothing whatsoever to do with the words I had sent him. There was no detail in his advice. He gave no tips on what, exactly, to do.

Rather, he simply and elegantly cleared away the clouds in my thinking.

Here is the advice he gave me:

**“Just Sell
The Damn Thing!”**

I have, essentially, tattooed this advice on my brain. For nearly 15 years, it has served me well.

I consider it the **First Rule** to go back to whenever you're having problems crafting a sales pitch.

Most of the rookies who send copy to me for critiques are hopelessly lost by the end of the first page in tangents and irrelevant mumbling. They ask the reader, in essence, to “hang in there with me for a few minutes” while they stumble around some obscure back-story or historical reference or obtuse argument.

And, of course, that *drives a stake through the heart of your pitch*. The reader will NOT “hang in there” for even a millisecond.

You bore her, or confuse her, or cause her to raise an eyebrow wondering what the heck you're trying to say... and she's *gone*.

There's an old technique in writing sales letters that even veteran copywriters still use. Often, we know that in the initial drafts of a letter, the first two pages will be useless throat-clearing.

And the “real” letter actually starts on page *three*. So, at some point of enlightened clarity, we simply *toss* those first two pages and... *voila!*... suddenly the letter is alive and kicking.

What typically happens in those first pages is the writer standing on the doorstep, stuttering. Trying to find a good way to start the real conversation.

Well, guess what? The “real” conversation starts when you begin your pitch in earnest.

In short... often, what you really want to do... is *just sell the damn thing*. Don't reach for justifications of why you're there, don't apologize about being a salesman, don't try to win over the reader with lame intuition.

You don't know what she's thinking, not really. She couldn't care less if you're uncomfortable. And any hesitancy on your part makes her very unlikely to stick around to see what else you're going to say.

So it's *not*: “Have you ever wondered, as I often do, where nails come from? My experience with iron nails is extremely fascinating...”

No, no, *no*. It's: “Do you use nails in your business? If so, I have critical information that will save you stunning amounts of money, and even shorten your workweek by ten hours...”

It is also NOT about the wild, wonderful path you took to get where you are now. Nor is it about that amazing revelation you had last week. Nor is it about anything else going on in *your* life.

It's not about *you* at all.

It's about *her*. Your reader. It's *always* all about her.

Look -- it may well be that the story of your progress or discovery or family tree is an important part of the pitch. But, for most rookie writers, attempts to weave this information into the copy is nothing but trouble.

Here is my basic advice: First, get your basic sales pitch down.

Then... you can go back and fool around with adding power words, boosting the “attitude” of the tone in your copy, or trying anything clever.

But first -- sell the damn thing. Make sure you know the elements of your pitch cold.

Simple, elegant, powerful advice, my friend.

Did You Know You Can Get Personal Advice From John Carlton?

You can schedule a one-hour phone consultation with John. They call this one-hour session a "Brain Cleanse", because John go deep into your biz model, sort out and solve problems you identify (and expose problems you may be overlooking), and generally focus our decades of experience on whatever situation you need help with...

... which can include everything related to marketing, writing for your biz, improving your online or offline sales processes, finding more prospects, increasing conversion, smoothing out operations and more.

Note From John: "This is serious business help for people who are serious about fixing problems and getting the best possible insight and advice from a respected, proven professional.

This is NOT cheap. This hour will cost you \$2,500 up front. There is no refund, so be sure I'm the guy you want to consult with before scheduling a session. I've been helping business owners and entrepreneurs and marketers and even other consultants for decades now. I've spent 30 years on the front lines of the biz world, seen it all (from the wildest possible success stories to the most dumb self-destruction of a good biz model) at all levels...

... and if you want that kind of real-world experience put to use for your benefit, then grab this opportunity to talk personally with me. The hour is yours -- you can ask specific questions, or go through specific ads or copy, or just mine my brain for any info, advice or knowledge you need."

Email my personal assistant Diane to set up your consultation (or get your questions about a consultation answered): consult@john-carlton.com

Chapter Seventeen:

Storytelling, Advanced Class...

The pro-level tactics on hooking, enthralling, and persuading your audience through a damn good tale loaded with “own the joint” verbal bombs.

I'm standing on the balcony of this famous old hotel with the wild rock and roll history, soaking up the balmy Southern California evening, sipping a beer and watching the developing street dramas seven floors down on the Sunset Strip.

It's quite a show, too.

Earlier, some friends tried to drag me into the Comedy Store next door to see if Chris Rock would pull another surprise visit to fine tune his act for his upcoming Academy Awards MC gig (as he had for the previous three nights).

But I decided to take a long stroll up Sunset instead. Who needs to hear prepared scripts when you're smack in the middle of a real-life Fellini movie like West Hollywood?

This part of town is where every kid and hustler with a dream of “making it in showbiz” lands first when they hit the coast. The scenes playing out below are what Guns ‘n’ Roses sang about in Welcome To The Jungle: “You can get anything you want, but you better not take it from me.” (Also “...if you got the money, honey, we got your disease...”)

Just this one microcosm of the Strip, a single block in either direction, has more melodrama and last stands and major plot points than you'll find in most entire cities.

From my perch, I can see the farmboy from Kansas putting the make on the little princess from Rio who's being introduced to the failed producer from San Diego by the strung-out guitar player from Belfast...

... and each of them appears to have a mangled screenplay in their back pocket.

This town is like a black hole -- it sucks you in, no matter how far away you are when you first hear the siren call of fame and the stars start twinkling in your eyes.

And, like a real black hole, it will gobble you up.

The scale of the odds *against* making it jumps at me from the giant billboard across the way for the cable cult hit “Monk”. Do you know how many Arabic actors are on the “A” list in Hollywood? You can count them on one finger.

And you only need the rest of that one hand to count the number of people who rose up this year from

the street to a steady income in the biz.

A precious few, out of vast *hordes* trying as hard as they know how to break into the club.

There ain't much of a *middle class* in the entertainment industry, either. Especially now, with the "blockbuster" mentality of the studios, which assures you of at least six movies each year starring Ben Affleck or Tom Cruise or Cameron Diaz, and just tiny little opportunities for new talent.

It's like the book biz. The airport and supermarket newsstands are dominated by a few authors (like Stephen King and Danielle Steel) who all have multiple books on the racks at any given time.

So, after the latest New York Times bestsellers get their slots, there's no room for anyone else, no matter how good your stuff is.

Getting a toe-hold these days in any of the industries that rely on public appreciation is just a mind-boggling exercise in frustration and frail hope.

Those few who make it, make it huge.

The rest limp along as best they can. If they don't quit when the writing's on the wall, they will be *forced* out anyway soon enough.

This truly is a Town Without Pity.

I had a front row seat for this ongoing show, back when I took over the "Big Chair" duties in Gary Halbert's office in the late 1980s.

Our digs were just down the block here on Sunset, across from the Roxy, in the Darth Vader-black 9000 building. There were talent agents on most floors, so every ride in the elevator was an adventure in star gazing. (I once shared rides with the Beach Boys, Burt Lancaster and five recent Playboy centerfolds, all in one day.)

I've never cared much for celebrities. After you've met your second one, you begin to sense the pattern -- Marlon Brando famously said "An actor is a guy who, if you ain't talking about him, he ain't listening."

Some people find this charming.

I found it a pain in the ass.

Still, I had fun hanging out with a "D" list crowd for a while. (The "A" list crowd would be famous people, like Cher and Clint Eastwood -- folks who get a table at Spago's just by showing up. The "D" list crowd I logged time with included failed producers, waitress/starlets without an acting credit to their name, agents with no clients, low-level technicians with fading dreams of directing, and paranoid screenwriters with several copies of their latest manuscript in the trunk, just in case you

wanted to see one. *“It’s Magnum P.I. meets Godzilla -- my agent is trying to get Jack Nicholson interested.”*)

One of my pals was a wannabe writer whose real talent was schmoozing.

He was good at schmoozing, but frustrated that he couldn’t seem to make any money at it. (I suggested he become a gigolo, and he considered the prospect seriously for a while.)

Every Friday afternoon, he’d field a dozen phone calls revealing where the weekend’s parties were being held... and this was his reward for lasting another week in SoCal. I went along for the ride, cuz it truly was a ride worth going on.

We’d start, for example, at a bungalow in the Hollywood hills for cocktails. I’d recognize maybe half a dozen faces in the swelling crowd, and maybe get a vague idea of who the host was from floating rumors. (*“He was the second camera director for all the Planet of the Apes sequels!”*)

Then, off to a bash at some too-hip-to-live club in Santa Monica. On lucky nights, our names were on the guest list (I never found out how or why). On more adventurous nights, we’d be hustled in through the kitchen (someone knew the cook).

Then, a wild drive to a loft in downtown L.A., dodging bums and winos and praying the homeboy gangbangers were cruising some other hapless neighborhood that particular evening.

(Transplanted New Yorkers considered these lofts amazing bargains, and just could not fathom why native west coasters shied away from them. Surrounded by blocks of empty, crumbling architecture, they created palatial digs on the upper floors of abandoned warehouses and pretended they were in SoHo.)

(I remember once watching from the roof as crowds of homeless gathered in the street below, attracted by the blaring techno-pop, like the snack-seeking zombies from Night Of The Living Dead.)

This party-hopping would continue until dawn, and include such unlikely venues as a dorm room at UCLA, a hidden cove at some beach in Malibu, backyard midnight barbeques in various ‘hoods, and windowless nightclubs with no signs marking their doors.

The most interesting characteristic of the people at these “D” list parties was the way their eyes were always glancing over your shoulder as you talked.

They were watching to see who else came in the door, and would abandon the conversation mid-sentence if they spotted a potential boost to their career making a rare appearance.

And there *were* ways to break out of that crowd and move into the real game. Quentin Tarantino and his producer were in this group, right up until they got “Reservoir Dogs” made with money from multiple risk-taking investors.

Never saw hide nor hair of them after that.

A couple of the other writers also got their movies made, usually under miniscule budgets that guaranteed a straight-to-video release, or had their screenplays optioned by studios. (An option meant the studio didn't want to make the movie, but didn't want anyone *else* to make it, either... so they paid the writer to take it off the market for a year or so. This is how Hollywood thinks.)

But *only* a couple of them made it.

And most of those only “sort of” made it... as their one meager screen credit became ancient history, and nothing else dropped in their lap, they were soon back in the party scene, glancing over people's shoulders.

I never even pretended to be interested in writing for the movies or TV. I was doing fine with my freelance copywriting gig, and had a novel or two in the bottom drawer to keep my creative chops honed.

I had an offer to write for a sit-com, and the reality of such a job *horrified* me. The only creative work on sit-coms gets done by the creators. After that, hired writers are told exactly what to write, and they are never, ever, ever to write outside the narrow confines of the already-established characters.

It isn't writing. It's slave labor factory work, with a keyboard.

I still shudder at the idea.

So, anyway, tonight I'm soaking it all back in from my balcony at the Hiatt House, which was dubbed the Riot House back when it was the preferred headquarters of bands like Led Zeppelin and the Rolling Stones during their hey-days (and where Keith Richards dropped a TV from the penthouse window to the sidewalk on Sunset during their Gimme Shelter tour) and...

... and...

... and this is a good spot to let you in on what I'm doing here.

I'm riffing on stories, because this chapter is all *about* stories.

Let's call it...

Storytelling (The Advanced Class).

The art of writing world-class advertising copy is based on the art of storytelling.

The best writers are addicted to stories, and their best copy hooks the reader through stories that cannot be put down.

Humans crave stories. We learn best from stories. A recital of the hard, cold facts may lay out a rational case for any given subject... but it won't get a toehold in your brain until you can frame those facts within a *tale*.

Before there was writing, cultures and entire civilizations relied on verbal stories for survival.

Their histories, their recipes, their laws and every other aspect of identity was kept alive through the art of storytelling.

When writing was finally invented (in Sumeria, I believe, through cuneiform), the newer art of *editing* was also born.

Things haven't progressed much since then. The killer writer still translates stories to a blank page, and edits what he writes until it says what he wants it to say.

There has been some serious *anti*-progress, in fact. We've gotten better at the way the words get written, with computerized technology, and we've gotten really good at the editing part with cool software.

(I can barely remember what it was like to have to strike through a typed word on a double-spaced manuscript with my ancient IBM Selectric, and type the new one above it. I've also forgotten most of the typesetting codes I would write in the margins in non-photo blue pencil, to indicate bold and italic, indents, inserted copy and other critical editing tasks now handled with a touch of a keyboard button.)

But we have NOT gotten better at storytelling. For most people, in fact, the entire art of storytelling has atrophied to the point of being *lost*.

As a culture, we have allowed our storytelling to be monopolized by people *without* a creative bone in their body.

Movies and television recycle increasingly dumbed-down versions of the same sad stories year after year after year. (Writers over the age of twenty-eight can't get work, which eliminates *actual worldly experience* from most storylines. And the youngsters' entire creative vocabulary begins with Star Wars and ends with Grand Theft Auto. Everything is based on someone else's experience, and it shows. Originality went bye-bye a long time ago.)

Few people read novels anymore.

And the great pastime of sitting around the dinner table, bullshitting and weaving tall tales, is just gone. *No time, Mom. Gotta text-message Suzy about Britney's latest video.*

This is a tragedy for the culture, but it's a tremendous *opportunity* for marketers.

Because storytelling is and always will be the most effective way to communicate your sales message and make it STICK.

And you know what? I don't care if you come around to studying storytelling because of cold-blooded greed, instead of a raw love of stories.

If greed is what is required to shore up the craft of storytelling, then fine. Whatever it takes.

I'm no purist. My mission is simply to get the art back on its tracks.

Cuz it needs all the help it can get.

So let's indulge in a fun little lesson, whadya say?

I know that most of you have weak or completely dead storytelling skills, because I see so many ads cross my desk for critiques that lack even a whiff of a tale.

You *have* stories to tell... but you can't figure out how to *tell* them. There's a sense that it's even silly to *try*. As if trying to tell a story is somehow embarrassing to the modern mind.

And that's just bone-headed wrong.

So get rid of your queasiness about storytelling right friggin' now. I'm sure you have good reasons to balk -- maybe you had an uncle who bored the life out of you with endless tales that had no point...

... or maybe you had a succession of dreary English teachers who did their best to gut the art with droning lectures (that also had no point).

Or maybe you're just one of the many who have been *lulled to sleep* by the lack of exposure to world-class storytelling. You're watching too much TV, you haven't touched a novel in decades, you're just numb from the constant assault of consumer messages out there.

Doesn't matter. Trust me on this.

You CAN learn to tell a story. You DO have a story to tell. And learning this WILL make your life richer (in cash terms) and fuller (in social terms).

It isn't about novel writing, either.

The stories in my best ads sometimes take up less than a paragraph. Sometimes the entire ad is a story, but don't let that scare you.

The job of the story in an ad is to make the sales message *come alive*.

Because, once alive, it will sit inside the reader's brain, writhing and whispering and not allowing

him to sleep until he succumbs and orders.

The story in a great ad is not *complete*, you see. It brings the reader in and makes them a part of the plot.

And the best part of the story only begins when the prospect relents and allows himself to become a character, a *participant*.

The final chapters, so to speak, are the testimonials he writes after his personal contribution to this ongoing story are complete.

It's like joining a special club. Where, unlike most people's lives, something exciting and wonderful happens. *"Yes, I bought that product, and it changed my life. I am now a happier/richer/better person for it, and the adventure is continuing."*

One of my longest stories was a nickel letter I wrote for my self-defense clients. It weaves a tale for two pages about a skinhead bar in Oklahoma, and it's desperately-good reading. The lust for the product begins before a single word of actual sales copy is read.

That ad pulled well for years, without a single word change.

One of the shortest stories was in the Rodale sex letter (which was the control for five years) -- just a quick mention of the drama of the researchers, and the implication of a shock wave rippling across the culture.

Then, on to the details.

I only *needed* a small story to get the ball rolling. The "details" of a sex-related product trigger multiple storylines in the reader's brain all on their own.

It's like lighting a fuse -- you don't need to struggle with allegory and metaphor. Just lay out the quirky facts, and let the fun begin.

So don't get scared off with thoughts of staring down the blank screen, struggling to craft Moby Dick to sell your widgets.

It ain't like that.

The best stories are often quick and dirty. And, like the Rodale letter, they ignite a very personal story *already* lying dormant in your prospect's brain. It doesn't take much to engage that part of your reader's mind, either.

We're talking about a deft touch here.

So, let's start small.

At my seminars, I try to jump-start attendees storytelling chops by asking individuals to tell me what happened between checking into the hotel and reaching their rooms the previous day.

Nothing fancy. Just what happened.

Most draw a blank. They vaguely remember being at the counter downstairs, have no memory at all of the elevator ride, and then there are snatches of detail from the room.

But nothing remotely like a *story*.

And my response is always the same: *Are you friggin' KIDDING me?*

You can't *not* have a story, unless you were drugged senseless and deposited in your room by bellhops.

But then, even *that* would be a hell of a story, wouldn't it.

Look. You're in a strange hotel, in a strange city. In Reno, it's a friggin' *casino*, for crying out loud - people with horrible fashion sense are glued to keening machines, trays of booze are always inches away, a band is butchering Creedence Clearwater Revival tunes, and someone somewhere is hollering about something that just happened at the craps table.

The clerk at the desk is not a mannequin. There may be some flirting going on, or the illusion of flirting. There's a hustle and bustle on the way to the elevators, and you probably got momentarily lost on the way.

People crowded into the elevator with you, reeking of beer and cologne, speaking a language you've never heard before (they were from Shreveport, it turns out), and a kid in wet swim trunks punched all the buttons, so it took ten minutes to reach your floor.

You followed the maze of halls to your room, made a wrong turn, couldn't operate the key the first four times, finally got in, and after making sure the toilet wasn't leaking and the lights worked and there was no axe murderer lurking in the shower, you opened the curtains and surveyed the view.

And hey, what's going *on* down there in the parking lot? Is that my car?

And so on.

So, okay, it's not Shakespeare, and probably you'd never use this tale to seriously try to sell anything... but it's a story.

Something happened. You *observed* it happening. You can *relate* what happened back in the form of a story.

And, if something *really* cool happened, you can go to town with it. (At one seminar, a guy finally remembered that he'd actually met a lady on the elevator, saw her later that night and had coffee with her... and maybe had a *date* with her for the following day. Yet he hadn't considered any of this worthy of a story to be told.)

The biggest fear of rookies is to be found *boring*. And, to be honest, if your storytelling muscles are atrophied, you WILL be boring at first.

But you'll get the hang of it soon enough.

Stories aren't interesting just because you're telling one. In fact, there are three simple rules to follow to make sure you don't put anyone to sleep:

1. You must involve the listener. You do this by anticipating questions an involved person might ask. So, it's not "*Hey, I saw Madonna at the grocery!*" Instead, you anticipate the question "*Really? What was she doing? Anything weird?*" And bring those questions into your story before they are asked.

2. A good story has inherent interest, or even shock value. So, yeah, while you're getting over being startled at simply seeing Madonna in the flesh, look for details that can support a little drama, or tragedy, or mystery, or humor. "*She was in the produce section, squeezing cucumbers in a really filthy manner. She looked kinda heartbroken.*"

3. Finally, have a point. A good story opens up new avenues of conversation and thought. "*I've heard she has a fancy condo nearby, but it's still a thrill to see someone so famous up close and personal. Have you seen any celebrities like that?*"

Go back to how I described this hotel I'm staying in.

Other people, in the same joint, with access to the same information, would say "*Yeah, I had a room in a decent hotel, a fifty buck taxi ride from the damn airport. I guess it was some kinda famous place or something at one time.*"

And that would be it. A listener, having no clue what the guy was talking about, would let the matter rest, and any fledgling story from even an action-packed day on Sunset Blvd, in West Hollywood, surrounded by intense drama and mutating culture skirmishes, would die quietly.

Just as bad, of course, is the unfocused babbler. Who would take forty attempts at getting you interested in their monotone story, without establishing a single plot point. "*Yeah, it was great! I flew into LAX, god what a filthy airport, I mean, like, gross! I can't use public toilets, I just cannot do it, so I was like, in total misery during the cab ride. I think the hotel was in Hollywood, they painted the building an icky shade of pale blue and hey! I saw this billboard for Moby's latest CD, it was soooo big...*"

And any potential storyline gets crushed under the weight of tangents and irrelevant detail.

Be pithy, be in the listener's pocket, and have a point. That's the key to great storytelling.

Let me give you another example from my trip: The afternoon I arrive, I have dinner with Joe Polish, who has just completed a seminar at the hotel. We go next door, to this steak joint that's made up to look like the rough-hewn bar in "Urban Cowboy", complete with bull-riding machine.

Now, several factors have set up a very interesting situation.

First, Joe likes this restaurant so much, he's eaten nearly every meal here since he arrived. So our waiter recognizes him.

Next, the place is also filled with attendees from his seminar, who are still buzzed with excitement over the event (which ended just an hour earlier).

Finally, Joe is unconsciously in possession of a verbal "**bomb**".

Imagine this scene: I'm sitting with Joe, trying to eat my steak. A couple of very attractive women come into the place (his assistants) looking for him, get details on what to do with certain pieces of equipment and scheduling for the next day, and leave.

A dozen people, from different tables all over the restaurant, keep staring at us and waving at Joe and smiling. Several come up and ask for photographs with him, and autographs. Joe, feeling relaxed, even poses on the bull.

The waiter -- part of a staff eternally on the lookout for celebrities -- starts paying *very* close attention to us, trying to figure out what's going on. It's the most attentive service I've had in a long time.

Then, while the waiter hovers, Joe drops his "bomb" -- he has been invited to attend the Academy Awards this weekend, with his high-profile friend Bill Phillips.

Suddenly, I can SEE the buzz ripple through the room. Every staff member's head jerks in our direction as word spreads. Other patrons start whispering and staring.

We get free dessert.

God knows who people thought we were. Joe's seminar was for *carpet cleaners*. The fawning fans were all cleaners who were grateful for Joe's advice, which helped grow their businesses by leaps and bounds.

I'm about to bust a gut laughing. As long as no one figures out this is a carpet cleaning crowd, we're celebrities. **We own the joint.**

The *illusion* of celebrity is just as good as the real thing... as long as you have the right details.

There's a lesson here somewhere, of course. But regardless, it's still a funny story.

Let me finish with what I call a “**Resume Stretch**” (as in credentializing someone):

My friend Joe has gone from clueless long-haired punk rocker to world-famous marketing guru in such a short time, he's barely had time to shave.

His first real attempt to act like a grown-up involved starting his own carpet-cleaning business. His first real business realization was that he was gonna go *belly up* if he didn't learn about advertising and marketing.

So he knocked, he asked around, he sought out help. He found Halbert, discovered he lived in the same town as Dan Kennedy, found me through Dan, found other experts, kept after it...

... and, in short order, discovered he was just too damn good at the gig to remain “just” a carpet cleaner.

So he became a marketing guru to *other* carpet cleaners.

Don't scoff. As obscure a niche as that seems, his seminars bring in hundreds of people from all over the world, and he's so flush that he gives away cars every year during his biggest event. Corvettes, Hummers, Jaguars.

So don't scoff.

Joe became addicted to learning about every aspect of advertising and marketing, and became friends with some of the most influential people in the biz. He interviewed them, hung out with them, drained their brains of knowledge. (His interview with me is still a best-seller, I hear.)

He's now known far outside the carpet-cleaning niche, and his audio course (on advanced marketing tactics) is now an international *top seller* for Nightingale-Conant. He's now good pals with Sir Richard Branson of Virgin Air, for crying out loud.

Joe is the reason I got on a plane and came to Los Angeles today. He'd arranged an extended brain-storm session up at Bill Phillips' mansion in Beverly Hills, and the attending line-up was just too impressive to believe.

Major Web honchos, top business authors, owners of \$70-million companies, and some of the savviest entrepreneurs alive were there.

Bill Phillips, of course, is the genius behind MetRx, the first quality protein drink for athletes, and the taking-the-country-by-storm book “Eating For Life”. Bill is very passionate about transforming people's lives, starting with their basic health and well-being... and that passion has been *amply* rewarded.

Next stop: HBO reality series.

These were some *nice* digs in Beverly Hills. Up in the part of town where you must pass a couple of guarded gates, where the *guest* houses out back are 3,000 square foot 4-bedroom/3-bath beauties, where your neighbors are the likes of Eddie Murphy and Rod Stewart.

But I didn't come down here just to marvel at mansions.

Nope. I came... because Joe *asked* me to.

This rug cleaning former-punk rocker has acquired *that* kind of mojo.

Why? No mystery. Like most men of worth and substance, he is both interested and interesting.

He brings something unique to the table -- balls, street savvy, and content.

That's a VERY RARE combination. If you were to choose traits to emulate as you attempt to become more and more successful, you couldn't find better ones than these.

But his gumption, smarts and substance isn't what really got me on a plane (which I hate doing lately, for any reason). I spend most of my days talking with movers and shakers on the phone, and never really *need* to fly anywhere.

Rather... what completes Joe's mojo, for me... is the fact that he's also clearly **insane**.

In a good way.

He's unpredictable, funny, with a quick and sick wit that is a relief to experience.

See, I turn down nearly all offers from new clients, because frankly, I loathe being *bored*.

And most clients *are* drab, dull, and seriously lacking in piss and vinegar.

Life's too short.

So, what the hell, when Joe called and asked me to hop on down to Los Angeles and hang with him and a few other maniacal geniuses, for some vague "meeting of the minds" session, I didn't hesitate.

At times, business *can* be fun, as well as profitable. That's what makes life worth living.

So, when you come across those kinds of opportunities, you're *nuts* not to jump on them.

I met many extremely worthwhile people today, at the brainstorm. Renewed some old acquaintances, strengthened a couple of potential business alliances, started a few balls rolling, and found serious

common ground with some great thinkers.

It was like stumbling on a treasure map, with the trove just a few feet away.

And only a certified and charming whack job like Joe -- who has earned the trust of so many diverse players -- could have pulled it off like that.

Okay, let's get back to the lesson on storytelling.

Do you feel like you know Joe a little bit now? I didn't describe his *physical* traits at all -- you couldn't pick him out of a line-up if your life depended on it.

But I did deliver a whole boatload of information on the *substance* of his life. And I did it in a way that lets you get to know him.

The same facts, delivered in list form, cold and without embellishment, would give you an idea of his work resume...

... but wouldn't give you much insight to the *person*.

Almost every time a rookie writer tries to credentialize someone in their copy, they get hung up on trying to mesh the *facts* with the *humanity*.

And that makes the copy difficult to read, like slogging through deep mud. Most readers won't do it. You *lose* your audience when you numb them with figures and facts and bland details.

But if you turn those facts into a *storyline*, you can hold interest. And get your point across.

My point here was simple: Joe embodies the personality traits of people who *get stuff done*.

It's worth observing, and worth aiming for, if being part of the action is something you value.

There was another tactic used here that you can use when addressing your own "herd": I bounced everything *off* me, as a reference point, because you know me.

If you've been reading my newsletters, my courses, my blog, then you've got a "feel" for how I operate. So I'm a known entity, which adds credibility to everything said about Joe.

I also couched it all in the sub-story of this trip to Hollywood. And targeted it to marketing enthusiasts.

To someone *outside* our little circle of interest, this whole passage would probably have been bafflingly irrelevant.

But then, a detailed story about Britney Spears would draw a yawn from anyone over the age of

fifteen who actually cared about music.

So, let's wrap it up.

Storytelling is mostly a dead art in our culture. That's an "in" for savvy marketers, because people love good stories, and it's the best way to get your message across in a way that *sticks*.

Your biggest blunder will be *boring* your reader. So focus on delivering your story using the three rules: **Be pithy, stay in your reader's pocket, and have a point.**

Start honing your chops today. Observe more closely, and retain details. Toss the irrelevant stuff, but *use* the tasty chunks to make your tale sing and zing.

You're gonna like what happens to your ads.

How To Join John's Exclusive Mastermind Group.

John and his longtime biz partner Stan Dahl host an exclusive ongoing mastermind group called "The Platinum Mastermind Group". The group meets 4 times a year, and maintains an online members-only email group so members can interact, help each other in-between meetings, and take full advantage of the mastermind concept (brainstorming, networking, getting critiques, floating ideas, using each other's Rolodex's, etc.).

This group is the flagship group in John's world. He keeps it small, so everyone gets detailed, intense attention during each meeting. It's not your usual mastermind, either – rather, every member gets a Hot Seat total-focus hour centered on your chosen subject or subjects (which can be anything you feel you need to get group input or advice on... from reviewing new marketing programs, to creating new products, to entering new markets or starting a new biz entirely... and even how to better combine work and private life successfully).

This is a brilliant way to get confidential access to some of the savviest business minds around, plus have a group of entrepreneurs who share your worldview be there to watch your back, help fix problems, and enlarge your network dramatically.

To get more information, email John's personal assistant Diane at consult@john-carlton.com
