

Cut the Crap
*~ Why authenticity matters for brands
and business ~*

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By Lisa Steingold
Foreword by Derryn Jackson

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To my sister Lauren, thank you for you!

Acknowledgements

Thank you to these incredible people who have shaped me, inspired me and sometimes given me the proverbial kick in the ass that was needed.

Thank you to mom, dux, dad and Jen. I obviously couldn't have done it without you but I mean in figuratively too. Mom and dad, you both inspire me with the characters that you are and how you have always conducted yourself based on your values.

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Foreword

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*“What a tangled web we weave, when we first choose to
deceive”*

~ A very insightful 12 year old girl once said ~
.....

I don't think I know anyone as ferocious in problem-solving as Lisa is. The quest for the solve has driven her to face the kinds of fears most of us will happily leave in ignorance's arms. On both a personal and professional level, Lisa has surmounted environmental challenges as well as personal ones. It's inspiring to say the least.

One thing is un-arguable. The digital explosion, eruption, revolution, evolution, has changed the communications landscape. Marketing and advertising, in its simplest form, is still just communications. I say 'just' loosely, as we all know, that even though communicating is as basic a need as eating is for the human race, we often get it wrong. So horribly wrong. Communications is a dynamic being. It is a collaboration between science and feeling.

Digital has only magnified this concept.

Brands and organizations have had to have an awakening. Sometimes a rude one. Internal and external stakeholders have been influenced. The agile and cognizant ones have taken this new playing field and all its toys and are ruling the playground. Others are still stuck on the roundabout wondering how to get off.

Cut the Crap has come at exactly the right time. With an extending global worry and outcry against corruption, a turbulent political front, a seemingly more unstable financial house of cards, the tightening of budgets from consumer to within organizations, the need to be more creative in problem-solving is more pertinent than ever. Some of the current buzzwords flying around are design thinking, ideation innovation, transformational change etc. All with the basic intention of solving problems, or being solutions driven.

On the human collective front, there is a burning need for the real and transparency.

From my own growing experience, brands and organizations are struggling to navigate this changed communications landscape, and could benefit from taking things back to basics.

It's difficult to say which was my favourite part of *Cut the Crap*. Lisa unearths the main culprit (you'll have to read on to find out) and I found the negative ripple effect of saying one thing and doing another something I have experienced and yet not being able to accurately explain. Or understand the effect. Until now.

The power of perspective that comes from *Cut the Crap* is undeniable, you just need to be willing to take that brave step and try it.

Knowledge has always been power, it allows for informed decisions to be made. It was never going to be easy, but then easy is boring, right? Whatever your endeavor, you will find that the truth really will set you free.

This was easy to write Lis, I just wrote the truth. I'd wish you all the best for the future but that's the easy route and you wouldn't take it. You'll forge your own one.

Introduction

The questions begs why “*Cut the Crap*” as title choice? Why not just Authenticity Matters or even just plain old Authenticity for brands and business??

Let me answer by saying there’s a scientific reason we say “*fuck*” when we kick the cat by mistake or drop our toast, upside down of course although Murphy is another matter entirely. There’s a reason we say things like “*this is a bunch of shite*” when referring to yet another blatant ploy of politicians to gain power.

There are varying degrees to which and reasons why we swear, but ultimately, so says Harvard Science Review, swearing conveys the depth to which we feel emotion. Swear words can also incite strong feelings in someone else when used by the speaker. I feel fucking strongly about this subject and hope that you will too when done reading this!

When, at first a year prior to my first word being written and mildly considering writing this book, the phrase popped into my mind as a title. I’d been thinking about the impact of being real on business and bottom line for a while. In the year that followed, having witnessed certain transgressions in governments worldwide as well as the

South African presidential antics, sharing my sentiments became non-negotiable.

This book isn't a nice little handbook of how to be authentic. I want to tell you that in the age of social media and the mobile revolution there's no fucking other way!

You won't survive!

I can't be sure you'll survive anyway; your product might not have a demand. Your brand and business processes may be so frustrating that they drive clients and customers away or you may not attain the brand reach necessary to make it through a cash flow crisis. That's true but what's also true and some might call me naïve for saying so is that unless you're, as per my definition of authenticity, transparent, consistent, unequivocal and truthful then you're pretty much up shit creek without a paddle and it's only a matter of time before you sink, or at the very least are found out.

Yes but Lisa what about politics? Surely this doesn't pertain to politics as politics is built on propaganda?

Yes, it pertains to politics, politicians and political parties. Especially so. The world is becoming too connected and people have access to information at the touch of a button

so there's nowhere to hide. The release of both South African and American presidential 'secret' emails have shown us that.

Back to survival. I'm actually not sure that authenticity is a pre-requisite for success, not in the short term anyway. If you're interested in the long game however, then it's an absolute. I'm talking about relationships as much as I'm talking brands, business and yes, even politics.

Along with BI (business intelligence) and the ability to innovate in relation to the pace at which life moves in the constant climate of change, authenticity may just ironically be the most powerful differentiator you have. It's in a constant climate of change that being real matters more than ever as people, us included, subconsciously seek stability and assurance from the brands and people we count on.

Far be it from the marketer in me to either delay gratification or save my message for the end of the introduction.

Who should read this book and why?

In my idealistic view, all marketers, chief executives (and yes that includes the chief financial kind too), strategists, heads of brands, entrepreneurs, students, government officials and non-government officials should read this book. My intention is that anyone who has input into the functioning of an economy should read this book.

Why?

Not to sound overly dramatic but to ignore the monumental and snowball effects of lack of authenticity, is to do so at your peril.

They say there's no such thing as coincidence and it seems to me just a little too ironic that I sit down to write the first words of this book on the day that South Africa chose to take a stand against Jacob Zuma. Ideally I'd like to know how the story unfolds right to the end and to reflect back saying that the truth won; that he admitted to being part of the Guptas' greater plan and that he stepped down honourably in order to honour his founding ANC ancestors. Realistically I doubt this is how the story is going to unfold and it's for that reason and many others that I now choose to write what has long been brewing within.

Business and private brands seem to be subjected to a more 'real time' mercy regarding lack of authenticity than governments and politics. I write this book in the hope however that governments and political parties, as brands unto themselves, will take heed for I doubt their worlds can sustain nor tolerate the theatrics much longer.

I've seen the implications and effects of lack of authenticity and it is truly devastating. I've seen colleagues and co-workers in tears as a result of master manipulator techniques used by those looking to push their own agenda at whatever cost and, as a result, resorting to distorting the truth to suit their own perceptions of reality.

I have seen the consequences on businesses when they aren't transparent with their clients and internal clients. I have observed how brands have gone from magnificent powerhouses to struggling entities as a result of omission of relevant information.

I have lastly, born witness to the shocking and horrendous impact on a nation when it's government blatantly lies and is deceitful to its followers; the people.

On a personal level, I've always been a stickler for transparency. Actually, and best I honour the truth, I've

been a stickler for transparency ever since the demise of my marriage. Many of you may be assuming, incorrectly so, that I was perhaps the victim of indiscretion within the marriage or perhaps that I've been holier than thou since birth. Neither of those assumptions could be further than the truth.

Was there indiscretion? Yes there was. Was I victim of it? Absolutely no. Not only was I the one to perform the indiscretion, or let's just say it like it is, have the affair but I wasn't a victim at all. It's since then, almost some 15 years ago, that I have uncovered sometimes radically disconcerting and difficult personal (un)truths but in doing so have undoubtedly enriched my life experience.

I have seen the dramatic and inconsolable effects of not sharing the truth; personally, professionally and for businesses, brands and yes, even governments.

Given my commitment to THE TRUTH I now wish to add a a little perspective; you will find books, authors and leaders who do not attest to the value of authenticity on the basis that it doesn't win you friends and can make life difficult. They are not altogether wrong but they're not altogether right either.

Authenticity needs to be tempered with wisdom and a touch of light heartedness, at times. Authenticity does not mean full disclosure of all things great and beautiful (and sometimes not so beautiful). Authenticity is by no means an avenue for airing dirty laundry. Cutting the crap as I'd like to term it, is quintessentially, a separation of what does not belong to the core essence of a person, brand, business or organisation. This will be clarified in greater depth in chapter 1 but essentially it means that behaviour can change, where appropriate, whereas values cannot. Behaviour that doesn't reflect a being's or entity's values needs to be culled to ensure survival.

Playing open cards can make life difficult but life is difficult anyway, so we may as well cut the bullshit and give ourselves, in whatever context, the best possible chance of survival.

I have always preferred a straight approach to writing and communicating as opposed to the sometimes, I find, overly complicated approach used in academia or the somewhat convoluted approach used in the legal, marketing and other professions. This manuscript is therefore relatively short and designed to be an easy read. I'd prefer you to take just a day out of your, most likely already busy schedule, to

read my thoughts, assess your own life, cut the crap and get on with life.

I have however endeavoured to ensure that this manuscript is factually correct and have included as many 'real' life examples from external sources, as possible.

So now let's just Cut the Crap.

What's my agenda?

Surely I'm not meant to have an agenda. Well you could call it my agenda but it's more of a philosophy that I'd like spread throughout the world.

My hypothesis is the lack of authenticity and transparency ends up costing time, money and often reputation, to such an extent that long term sustainability is also thrown out the proverbial window along with relevant value. We'll all just save ourselves a whole lot of pain and heartache; personally, professionally and commercially if we just cut the crap.

It's not to say that authenticity will guarantee success, commercially or otherwise in and of itself. I'm not sure that success can be statistically tied to a simple formula but if it

could, a good business model and other aspects such as business process must surely come into play. That said, my hypothesis is that, without presenting one's cards open handed, long term sustainability, be it in relationships or in business, is impossible.

In my time on this beautiful, crazy and often gut-wrenchingly painful planet I've seen the world change. I shall mention more on all the ways things have changed further on in the book but needless to say the digital world has shaped behaviour and reality. It's strange, because it's brought an inability to hide the truth and yet, for those devious and dark enough to do so, an ability to manipulate reality. At the very least, and not to sound overly dramatic, lack of authenticity results in premature failure of relationships, brands and businesses. It's this that concerns me deeply.

In addition, as a lover of brands and people, I want to ensure that those built on the cornerstones of love and passion have a place in the world for now and for the future.

Is making money a primary driver here? No as I'd have better spent my energy on a "Fifty Shades of Grey" type manuscript.

Basically, I'm looking to spread an idea through the world. Being real matters and it matters more than we think. It's a philosophy I wish to live and work by and also to spread throughout the globe. It may seem a little naïve but I'd like to prove otherwise.

It's on that basis that I want the book to be read and to impact people. I absolutely want the world to think differently having read these few pages. At the very least I want to prompt critical thinking which is something, I think, due to the digital revolution as we might call it, we do very little of these days. It's often only through an interruptive external prod that we tend to allocate critical thinking or even internal reflection to a subject. It's that or while taking time out, that we allow ourselves to question and as such perhaps act differently.

Given that we, the average smart phone user (is there such a thing as an average smart phone user?) checks their phone 80 times a day and spends over 3 hours on their mobile device, it's not surprising we don't have much time or capacity for critical thinking. It's a radical phone obsession that results in us checking our mobiles approximately every 11 minutes according to Apple.

Don't get me wrong; I work for a tech company. I believe in the value of tech; very much so! I do however feel it needs to be balanced and tempered with time out from the digital space, introspection, key relationships, nature, sport and other forms of emotionally and mentally stimulating activity which cannot be experienced in the digital realm for it's this that allows us to (to coin the Apple phrase), think different.

If we keep doing what we do, we keep getting what we get. On that note and then I'm going to get right to it, in the transition from 2016 to 2017, I began to look at the world and my position in marketing radically differently. Perhaps it started even before that, on a four month sabbatical to London in 2015. I remember going to see the film the Theory of Everything and walking out both inspired and utterly terrified. I was inspired because I knew there were possibilities waiting to be discovered and that I was teetering on the edge of the cliff, waiting to jump. I was terrified because I knew once I jumped, there'd be no going back. So it is and has always been with humans venturing into the unknown.

The unknown turned out to be a wild and for me, constantly terrifying ride (I can't say I embraced it gracefully at all)

that resulted in a number of shifted paradigms, one of which was my approach to brands and marketing.

The Lifetime Value (true value) of a customer aka Mastery in Dynamic Markets can, in my opinion, be reduced to a simple formula;

(Authenticity + Business Intelligence) x Innovation

Quite simply a brand's mastery, and by brand I mean person, business or organisation, can be ensured provided 'they' are authentic, they harness and make use of insights from data and implement innovation in terms of business process and a systemic approach. This doesn't mean that mastery, or material success in the form a customer for life as I intend it here, will be guaranteed over the long term in the same form; perhaps the business changes its offering or perhaps the model changes but given the desire to continue, it will succeed.

Mastery quite simply means success in terms of profitability as well as in a sense of fulfilment, which, I understand, is a little more difficult to quantify than profitability or the ability to continue business operations from a financial perspective. This will raise questions with reference to social concerns but even there someone is footing the bill so can be justified.

Authenticity in its strictest sense means of undisputed origin but I wish, rather, to refer to the essence of a brand or business.

Kyle Sherwin, then VP of media at Sony Music, once stated that authenticity was a word so overused by an industry (marketing) *that loves it's soup du jour, that it becomes almost meaningless.*

Whilst I don't necessarily disagree with him, I do believe that the time has long since come for a shift, not just in the industry of marketing and brands but in all aspects of life and business. This is being rapidly facilitated in the age of social and a mobile-first economy, the world over.

The rise of the mobile economy has given rise to organisations that are able to utilise 1st, 2nd and 3rd party data. Utilisation of this data in the ability to decipher insights that direct action accordingly is what can be termed business intelligence.

When the ability to be real or act in accordance with one's values is coupled with business insight and driven through an innovative systemic approach, well let's just say that's when the magic happens.

In this book however I wish to focus on the being real, and more to the point, the living real. My intention in doing so is to answer questions such as why should we care? What does authenticity mean? How do we 'do' it? What are the ethical implications and where do we draw the line? What are the parameters and possibly most substantial of all, given the current state of the world, is there a correlation to the bottom line and to long term sustainability?

It's not a particularly difficult read and will most likely tug on your psychological and philosophical strings more so than it will on your mental or academic ones. In all likelihood, and I hope this is so, it's the kind of book you take away with you for a weekend break returning with some fresh perspective about your life, profession and organisation and at the very least, something to think about.



Lisa Steingold

7 April 2017

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What's this BS about Authenticity?

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“The truth is that we’re attracted to the truth”

~ Lisa Steingold ~
.....

The following is an excerpt from Sam Harris’ book *“Lying”*;

At least one study suggests that 10% of communication between spouses is deceptive. Another has found that 38% of encounters among college students contain lies. However, researched have discovered that even liars rate their deceptive interactions as less pleasant than truthful ones...”

We’re attracted to the truth, to being real and to authentic engagement even subconsciously. In an edition if the 2015 Journal of Tourism Management, an empirical study was conducted with a sample of international tourists to various major attractions in Helsinki (Finland) and Jerusalem (Israel). The results indicated a correlation between place attachment and authenticity. In other words, major visitor ...

To purchase a copy of “*Cut the Crap; the Power of Authenticity for Brands and Business*” go to www.lisasteingold.com

