



The Advisory Alliance 60-Second Email™

Self-Help Books Sell Because They Don't Work ***April 24, 2007***

In this month's 60-Second Email™, we look at the critical weakness of most self-help books, and why it's important to put the book down, and get out of the tub.

Knowledge is cheap. Especially these days. Type in "lose weight" at Amazon, and you get more than 27,000 books. Type in "leadership development", and you get more than 14,000 books (which makes sense in a nation with an obesity epidemic and a talent shortage). Go to Google, and the results become even more insane (15 million entries for "lose weight" and 122 million for "leadership development" - maybe the rest of the world is healthier). Bottom-line, if you can't find enough information on a subject, you're either sleeping under a rock, or you're a perfectionist. Between Amazon, Google, and all the other virtual, flesh-and-blood, and bricks-and-mortar resources out there, you can learn about pretty much anything you want.

So how come then, if knowledge is all around us, we're not thinner and more fit, and companies aren't busting at their seams with too many highly effective leaders and managers?

Because knowledge only goes so far, and most people don't want knowledge; they want actual improvement.

Think about it: If self-help books were the answer, after the one had been written, there'd be no need for any more. We'd all flock to the one weight loss book, and *presto*, cardio man / cardio woman is unleashed! If leadership development was as easy as reading a book, we'd be new and improved in short order – a few hours spent reading in the tub, and then "Hello corner office!"

Obviously, this isn't the case. Long-term behavioral change takes determination over the long term. In our gut, we know that's so, and yet we still yearn for the magic weight loss pill and the next HBR book that will show us the way. So we continue to buy the self-help books that, fundamentally, don't work. Now that being said, knowledge, per se, is important. (Being ignorant isn't the best of strategies.) But for profound human change to occur, knowledge is necessary but it's not sufficient. Said less elegantly, knowledge is the cost of entry, but it's not going to make the difference. Sure we need to know all about diet and exercise, and how effective leaders lead

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and how they're different from poor leaders. But that's not enough; we might as well stay in the tub with our book. Instead, at some point we've got to get out of the tub, and into our life. If we want to lose weight, we must start by losing weight. If we want to be a leader, we start by leading others.

Is that all we need to do? Of course not. But we do have to start. Which is another liability of most self-help books, namely that they assume we all have the motivation to implement the teachings of the self-help book. But if, indeed, we had that motivation, why do we need the self-help book in the first place? We can't buy or delegate motivation; it must come from within. So that being said, how does someone get motivated? My experience has been that if you can't provide it yourself, you've got to find someone who can. This is not self-help; this is profound "other-help". Ignoring the accounts of heroic leadership that are popular in the business press, I've learned that those leaders who have risen above their challenges and hardships often have the following in common:

- 1) They found someone who truly supported and pushed them.
- 2) They acquired the needed knowledge to make the difference, and
- 3) At some point, they got out of the tub, and deliberately found opportunities that challenged them.

Human development is not an intellectual activity or curiosity. It is a participatory endeavor. Hopefully one that is life-long. It takes one's focus, stamina, and courage, and sometimes the support from someone who's been there before.

All things you just can't get from a book.

You can access this and previous 60-Second Emails™, as well as subscribe to our mailing list, via this link to our website: <http://www.advisoryalliance.com/newsletter.php>

Until next month,

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