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Making trouble



Troublemakers should be your favourite beast in the corporate zoo.

by Rich Porayko

My name is Rich and I'm a professional troublemaker. I make a living by challenging the status quo. I have high expectations and push my partners to do the best they can and expect the same in return.

What does being a troublemaker have to do with marketing? Everything. In his book *Tribes*, marketing guru Seth Godin describes a Troublemaker as someone who battles the status quo tooth and nail every day. He uses analogies like unicorns, change agents and heretics who are the change makers and speaks about conformist "drones" who are the status quo. When it comes to communicating about your business, safe is boring and boring is bad.

It is difficult not to become a conformist. Independent thought and behavior is discouraged in society. Conform to the rest of the team or get off the bus. Beware of individuals inside your organization who are enforcing a culture of conformity to protect their own way of doing things. A friend of mine has a co-worker that everyone in the office calls "the Dragonlady." Sound familiar? Dragons are those people everyone is frightened of. They are nasty and manage by fear. They are bullies and embody the status quo. These people should have their behaviour corrected by any means necessary. Ain't nobody got time for drama and politics. Troublemakers are the Dragon's worst enemy, but we avoid conflict while standing our ground. Seek out the Troublemakers in your organization and put them in positions to thwart or offset the Dragons.

A Dragon in management, or allied to a manager, can cause a lot of damage. Their negativity spreads. Soon, "nasty" becomes your brand. Spend time with your customer service department to neutralize the effects of Dragons. If the Dragon who is laying waste to your brand needs and wants help, get them help. If they need help but are not willing to accept it, it's time to fire fast and hire slowly. As far as customers

are concerned, customer service is the culture of your company. Frustrated customers spread negative feedback about your company and your nasty customer service reputation becomes a vicious, self-fulfilling prophecy.

Drones are less aggressive than Dragons, however their modus operandi is always the same: obstacles, blindsides, sandbagging, and drama. Troublemakers fight back against Drones by trying something new and different. They put themselves out there and take risks which means occasionally they fail. From my experience, there aren't enough people failing. Instead, there is no shortage of people lining up to point out the shortcomings of someone who puts themselves out there and doesn't find success right away.

There are ways of being a Troublemaker without confrontation. Open, transparent communication avoids blindsides. Getting buy-in from stakeholders from the beginning of projects is important. Creating change inside a company should be carried out like guerrilla warfare: smaller, targeted hit and run attacks instead of all-out assaults on strongly held positions.

One soft target for a beneficial change to your brand is your customer touch-points. A customer touch-point is any representation of your brand in print, email, fax or web. Try changing what you do in these channels frequently, then monitor and compare the results and ROI. Experiment with frequency. Giving your customer one custom framed photo of a high profile project to hang in their office may be worth more than any number of branded baseball hats or coffee mugs.

Invoices are a touch-point. So is your fleet. They are all a silent salespeople that tell a story about your company. Are your trucks clean? Is the signage modern and professional? Do customers complain your invoices are difficult to read? If your website or literature are embarrassing, quit apologizing about it and do something. Slay the Dragons and re-task the Drones.