

Flea Market-ing Lessons

By David Leonhardt

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David Leonhardt
Info@TheHappyGuy.com

Finding Happiness and Self-actualization <http://thehappyguy.com>

A few days ago, I was signing copies of my book – Climb Your Stairway to Heaven: the 9 habits of maximum happiness – at the flea market. Nobody expects an author to sign books at a flea market. Some people sell a few worn-over books, but authors just don't do book signings at flea markets. Especially not books about finding happiness.

I've never been afraid to be different, to take the road less traveled, to wander off the beaten path and run gleefully right over a cliff. Fortunately for me, the flea market is on low ground and I had the chance to learn a few things just watching people.

Pop Quiz: Is it best to wedge your booth between other booths piled with junk, where nobody even notices you are there? Or is it better to have a booth out in the open away from the clutter, where people can easily see you and get to your booth?

I learned the hard way. My booth was out in the open away from the clutter, where people could easily pick up speed and zoom right past. (But I was right next to a support beam, so at least I knew the roof wouldn't cave in on me.)

Apparently, the sales process at the flea market works like this:

Step one, some fool actually stops to look at a toaster-oven with only three coils missing, partially blocking the aisle.

Step two, a traffic jam ensues as more people come along and completely block the aisle.

Step three, to relieve their boredom, they buy "treasures" they would gladly have passed by if they could just have picked up enough momentum to keep walking. Isn't that a lot like how "gurus" sell stuff on the Internet?

Step four, they go home and brag about their great "find" and how it cost them almost 14 cents less than any of the other "Happiness is surviving your own cooking" commemorative plaques in their collection.

I leaned my second lesson. To sell anything, you have to slow people down. So I stood in front of my booth.

"Free bookmark, sir?"

Sir hesitates, then takes the bookmark.

"It features the nine habits of maximum happiness."

Sir studies the bookmark.

"Same habits as in my book right here."

Sir looks up at the display for a moment. Then he starts moving again, staring down at the bookmark, mumbling something under his breath and BANG! hits the support beam. "Ooh," I thought. "A few thousand more times and that beam might not hold. That could be dangerous."

Fortunately, I decided to relocate, standing with my back to the beam so people would pass safely to one side. Don't kill your customers: a brilliant idea whose time had come. I learned my third lesson after running through just 34 first aid kits.

I went through the same routine with Broad-eyed Lady and her husband, except that she missed the beam. She continued walking as she read the 9 habits of happiness on the bookmark, then suddenly slapped it against her husband's chest. "Here. Read this," she commanded.

Ouch. That's gotta hurt. Good thing I was giving away bookmarks and not paperweights.

I thought Broad-eyed Lady was a unique character, until Hunched Old Lady did the same thing. And so did Spunky Crew-cut Girl. And Grizzly Guy, too. I guess it's easy to expect others to change, rather than ourselves.

In fairness, few people used my happiness bookmark as a domestic weapon, a fact the judge took into consideration later that day. He even commended me for not giving away paperweights.

But he did order me to recount, without looking at my notes, the lessons I had learned watching people at the flea market. Let's see ...

Slow down, or you'll never spend your kids' inheritance on priceless knick knacks.

Grab people's attention or they will just whiz by.

Don't kill your customers

Don't expect people to change for you, even if you do wield a loaded bookmark.

The author is David Leonhardt, The Happy Guy. To receive his satirical happiness column weekly in your inbox, sign up at <http://TheHappyGuy.com/positive-thinking-free-ezine.html> or read more columns at <http://TheHappyGuy.com/self-actualization-articles.html> . Visit his home page "Finding Happiness and Self-actualization" at <http://TheHappyGuy.com> .

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