

What If PR Stood for People and Relationships?

a manifesto for building relationships in the digital era

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@briansolis @gapingvoid

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PR

PR doesn't stand for press release. Please appreciate that the "P" in PR stands for "public," not publicity or propaganda or publishing. This is about public relations. But perhaps even that doesn't quite capture the essence of the importance of PR. PR symbolizes People and Relationships.

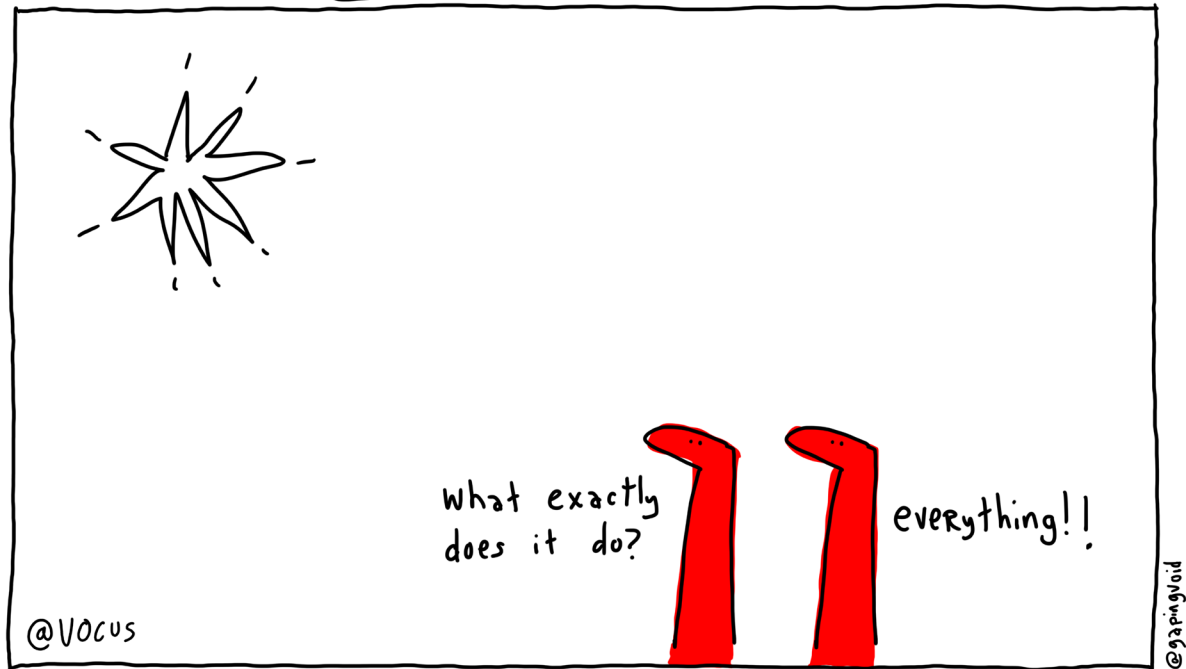
People...real human beings.

Relationships...the idea that we can do more together than alone.

PR = value

What can we do differently today, every day, that brings value to people and relationships?

SHINY OBJECT SYNDROME:



Marketing, PR, advertising. Everyone's chasing social, mobile, real-time. Perhaps we're blinded by the shininess of the latest object, but maybe we're looking for something. We're more than geeks. Perhaps there's a hope that the newness of a shiny object can fix our problems or help us achieve our goals. It's distracting and unproductive when we don't know why something is special. If you suffer from Shiny Object Syndrome, you are not **alone**.

What does it mean?

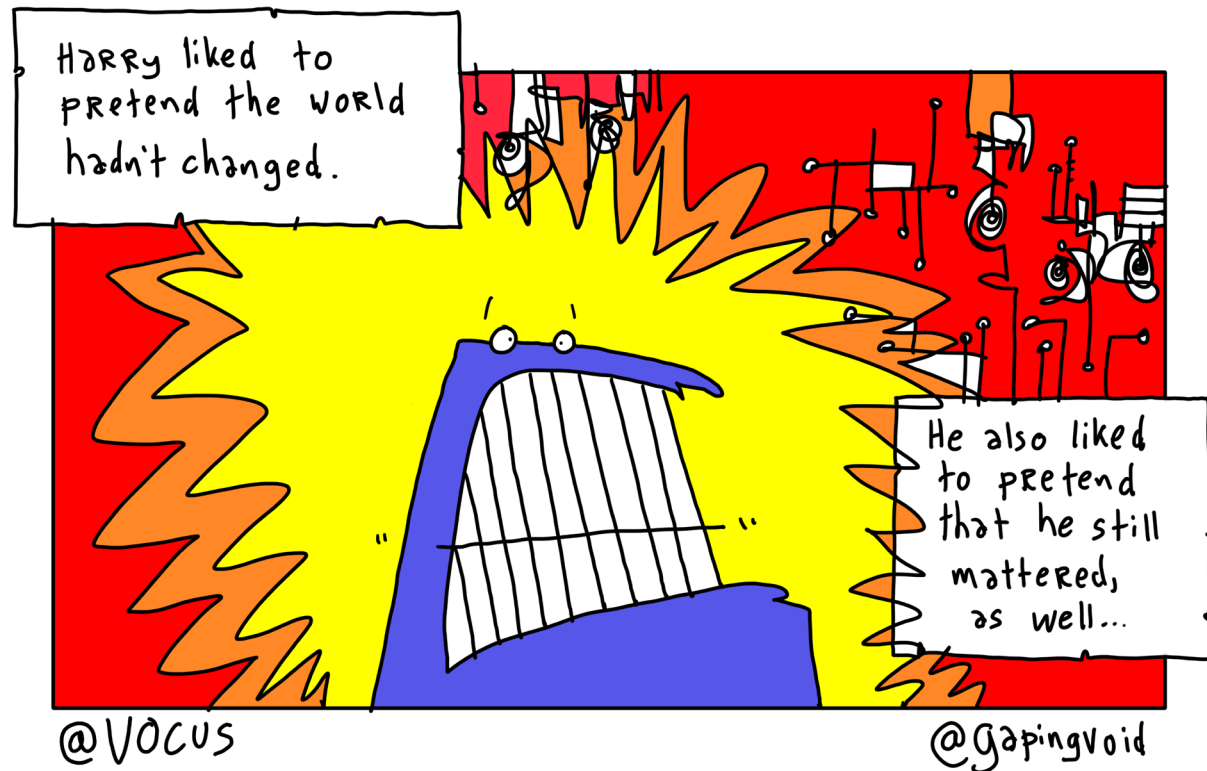
In the end, shiny objects may seem like they can do everything you needed or never knew you needed. And, in the grand scheme of things, they can also do nothing for you or anyone at all.

It's a fine line. I often say that great ideas and bad ideas sound equally ridiculous early on.

See technology for what it is, and make it more human. To make it more human allows us to share with people in ways that matter. It's a different place to start. We get caught up with life, with work, with a way of doing things. The secret to success, though, is to hit pause, to breathe, and to ask "what if..?"

Building bridges between you and the people you want to reach starts with turning an object or a thing into an opportunity to see and deliver value.





Remember when traditional marketing & PR worked?
Neither do we.

That's the point though. Everything's changed around us. Yet, we take what's new and stuff it into yesterday's processes without thinking twice.

At the same time, we're measuring all of this new work using dated standards and metrics of success.

We're comparing our work to others who have yet to figure out how to challenge the status quo.

Now is the time to question everything. Just because it's always been done a certain way doesn't mean that we can't innovate and shine in a whole new way.

That Moment When the Tech You Valued was No Longer Working for You

Our journey begins with a return to the basics.

Social media doesn't make you more social.

Mobile technology doesn't make you more relevant on the small screen.

The Internet of Things will be just fine without more things to distract us from functionality.

Big data doesn't really help you see people for who they are.

There's very little sharing in the sharing economy.

What's happening right now is something quite amazing. Yes, there are incredible trends disrupting everyday life now. But, we need to see why, to learn what we can do to shape the future for the better. See, technology, in its own way, is making us more human. Imagine what we can do if our work became more human, too.

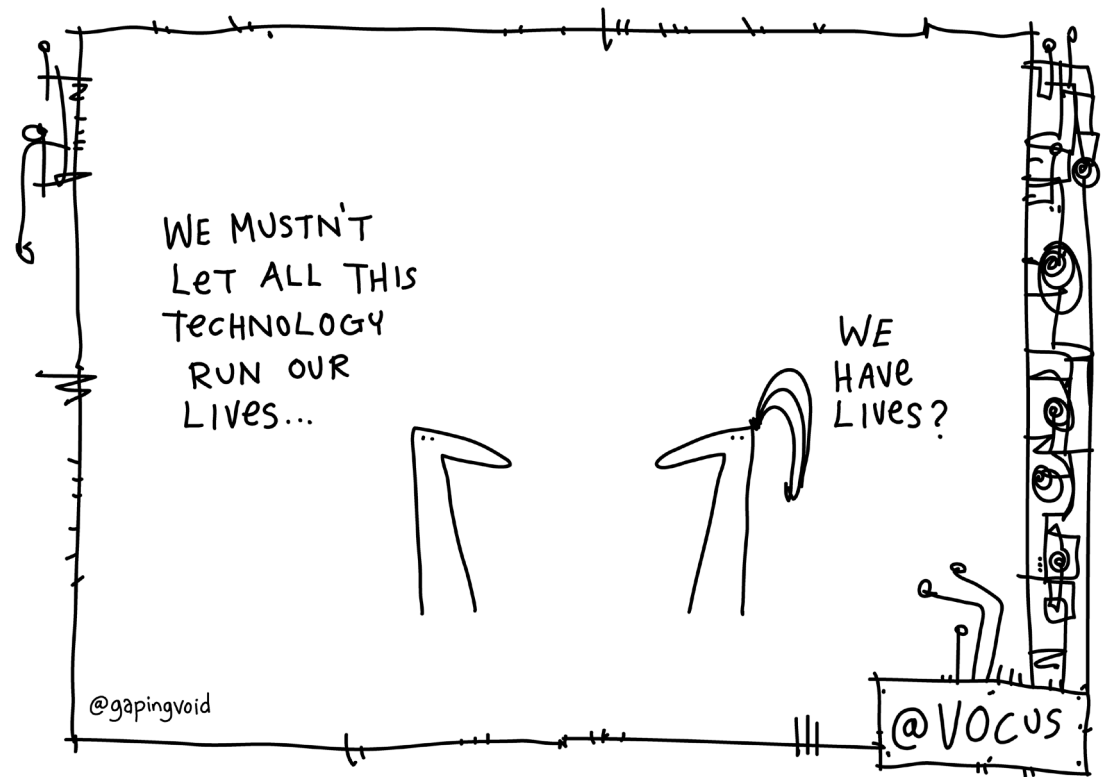
Look out! It's the rise of the [marketing] machines!

Marketing automation ✓

Mass personalization ✓

Anti-social media ✓

Not-so CRM ✓



Technologies are actually making us more human, and social, albeit in a different, yet still meaningful way. We get to see people connected to people who matter to them and we get to learn about what they share to help us stay closer together.

All too often, we get caught up in the busy work. We're under deadlines. We're publishing against calendars. We're blasting-off emails and status updates like we're NASA or SpaceX.

We're moving too fast. We need to move slow. Embrace slow. Learn. Change. Lead the way.

The Top 10 Ways to Stop Top 10 Lists

Moving slowly. Hmmm, that sounds nice. What happens though, when we're measured against "fast?" Or, when we're measured against quantity and not quality?

How we define success...now, that's what we really need to change. The talk of change all sounds too familiar, I know. Maybe we've become desensitized to it. Some of us have been talking about the need to do so for so long. Some of you have also been asking "why" for so long. "Why do we need to keep doing it this way?"

Do we just give in? Do we just become part of a marketing machine that refuses to die? Do we willingly become accomplices to marketing campaigns that might, at the surface, appear creative, but miss the very people they're attempting to engage? Yes. It's a case of creative vs. engagement when it doesn't have to be. They can and should live together in harmony.

How can we change when we think, work and invest through a campaign mentality? Maybe it's because we celebrate these campaigns too much. Yes, a lot of them are fun. Some are sexy. Others are innovative. Many are glamorous, too. But, all of these examples are shared and over shared in books, articles, conferences, and as a result, they become the standard to match or beat. We then set out to copy one another. We even try to leap frog one another. Eventually, each round of greatness reduces into a series of listicles such as "The Top 10 This" or the "5 Winning Ways That."

That's for everyone else though. We have to see the world differently, not for what it is, but for what it could be.

I Don't Even Try to Make Eye Contact.

Why Would We Want to Talk to Someone?

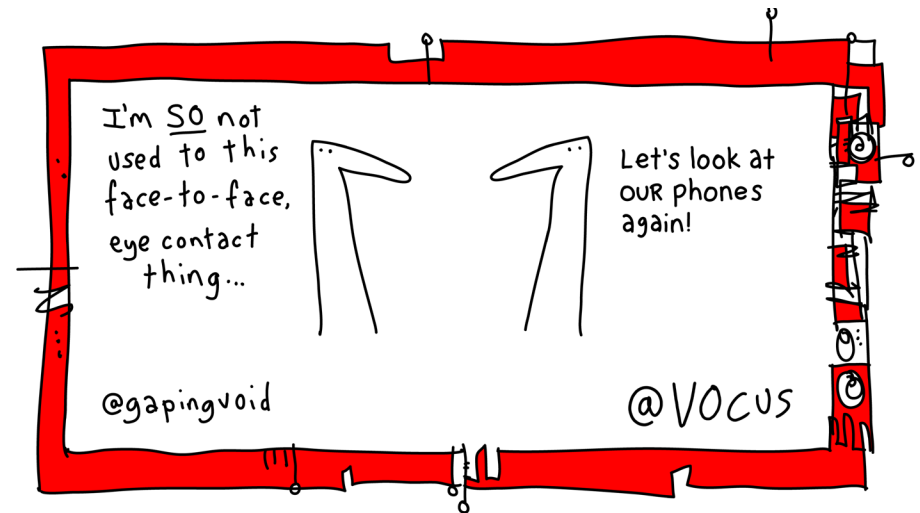
Go anywhere, sit back and watch those around you. You'll see some very interesting things...things we take for granted every day. For when you do, you'll notice how friends sitting together won't actually be sitting together. They won't really make eye contact. They might not say much to each other. But, here's what's interesting: they'll still enjoy each other's company I bet.

What are they doing?

They're living the digital life in the real world.

We probably do it, too. We all stare at our phones to see the world, our friendships, and the information and events they share through the small screen. We don't want to be left out. In fact, we want to be part of it. But yet we judge them. It's different than how we grew up. I guess that makes it not only different but also wrong. I don't think so.

Instead of critiques or criticisms, try understanding. Empathy is a gift. Not only that, empathy is the key to earning relevance and building relationships with a different type of customer.



They say the first step to change is recognizing the need to change. It's hard, though. We know a different world, a world which was ours. We are set in our ways.

We've watched the world change. We can't pretend we don't judge it. At the same time, some of you see the world today as the only world you know. We also can't pretend you don't judge the way it was.

We are all human, even though there are differences between the generations. It is those differences that open opportunities for us to work together. And, it is in this moment, we can see the world differently. We can see how we add value to not just people like us, but also learn how to add value to people who are not like us.

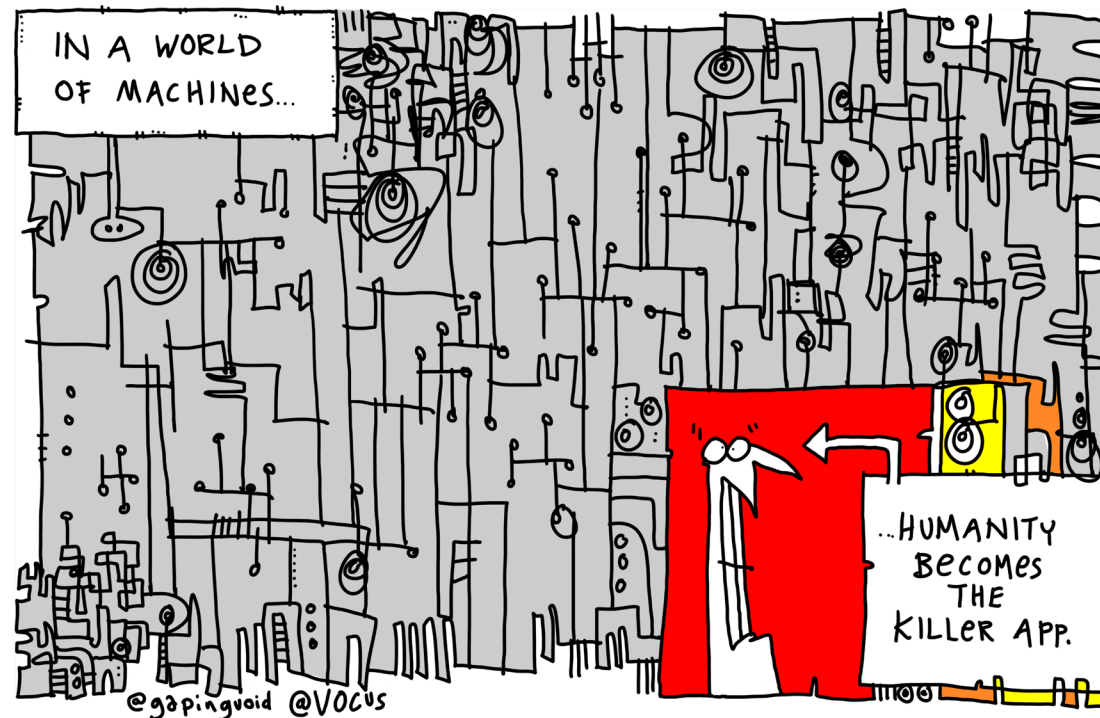
**What
Happens
Next
Happens
to Us or
Because of
Us**

It's easy to over-rely on technology as it becomes part of our lives. We use social networks, apps, devices, to stay connected to one another. It's easy to let the machines do what they do. Relationships are powered by people... not technology.

Everything begins with caring. And, caring begins with empathy. Use technology as an enabler that brings to life a higher purpose.

Albert Einstein once said, "Strive not to be a success but rather to be of value."

Humanity becomes the killer app. Relationships built upon a foundation of reciprocity and loyalty are your rewards.



What Is the Value of Value?

What is value? Technically, value represents the importance, worth, or usefulness of something. Over the years, I've learned that value also lies in the eye of the beholder. Sometimes the value we think we deliver and the value people want, need or expect may in fact, be different.

Amazon CEO, Jeff Bezos, once said that your brand is what someone says about it when you're not in the room.

Wait. People have their own opinions and impressions about us? I thought everything we say and do is formative, influential and effective.

As people who are not only marketers, but also marketed to, we know this to be true. This is the essence of marketing. How do you get someone to feel and share what it is you stand for when you're not around?

I don't believe we set out to not deliver value in all we do. I don't believe any marketer or communications professional starts by saying, "How can we talk to everyone and no one at all?" We're measured, though, by our actions and words. Knowing that, what's next?

Tech automation solutions were created to help us scale everything from sales to customer service to marketing and everything in between. Automation historically brought about distance between us marketers and people. It was complicated. It was impersonal. We didn't mean it to be, but it just was.

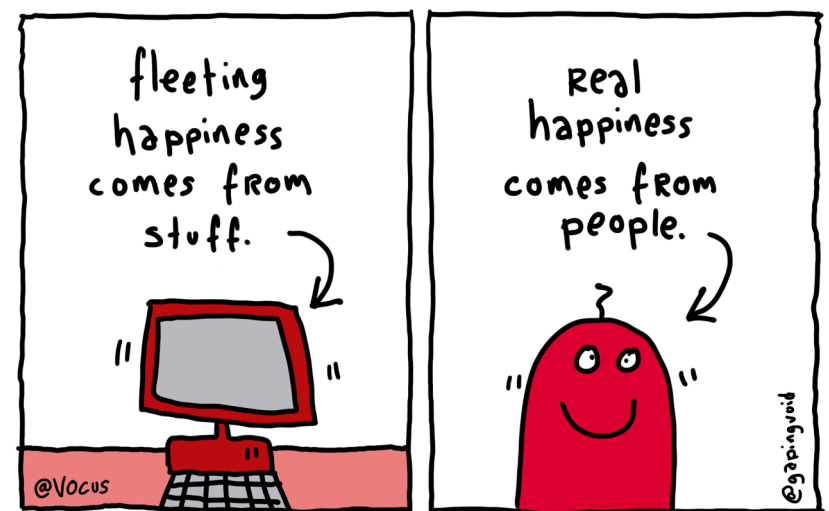
Now with all of the trends in mobile, real-time and social, it's becoming way too easy to be trendy. After all, if we don't, how else will we keep up? Pinterest, Twitter, Facebook, Tumblr, Vine, Snapchat, etc. etc.

We amass technology like we amass friends online. The signal and the network are thus full of noise.

When we do so without a vision or purpose, we miss the opportunity to become real, to become interesting, to become human. We just become a number that cares about other numbers.

Everything is different now. It has to be. Automation promises so much. We just need to appreciate what's possible now. We need to think about value and connections. That's something that we can't find in technology. We have to find it in ourselves. We then use technology as an enabler for something better.

Be the signal.



Technology Makes Everything Easy... Maybe, Too Easy

All of the tech we use in our personal life didn't come with an instruction manual. Our teachers and parents couldn't mentor us in their use because everything was new to them. In fact, not only was it new, it was in many cases foreign and counterintuitive.

What used to be complex or even unfathomable was suddenly before us. With a pinch, swipe, and capable thumbs, we were able to connect and communicate in a whole new way.

We didn't have filters. We didn't have boundaries. We didn't have time for imagination to scale. We expected the world to revolve around us. For a time, it did.

We could reach even more people with our story. Our brand could soar to new heights. And so much of this was free. It was almost too good to be true. With the right technology, we could amplify "us" to the masses. How lucky is everyone else to hear from me? You're welcome.

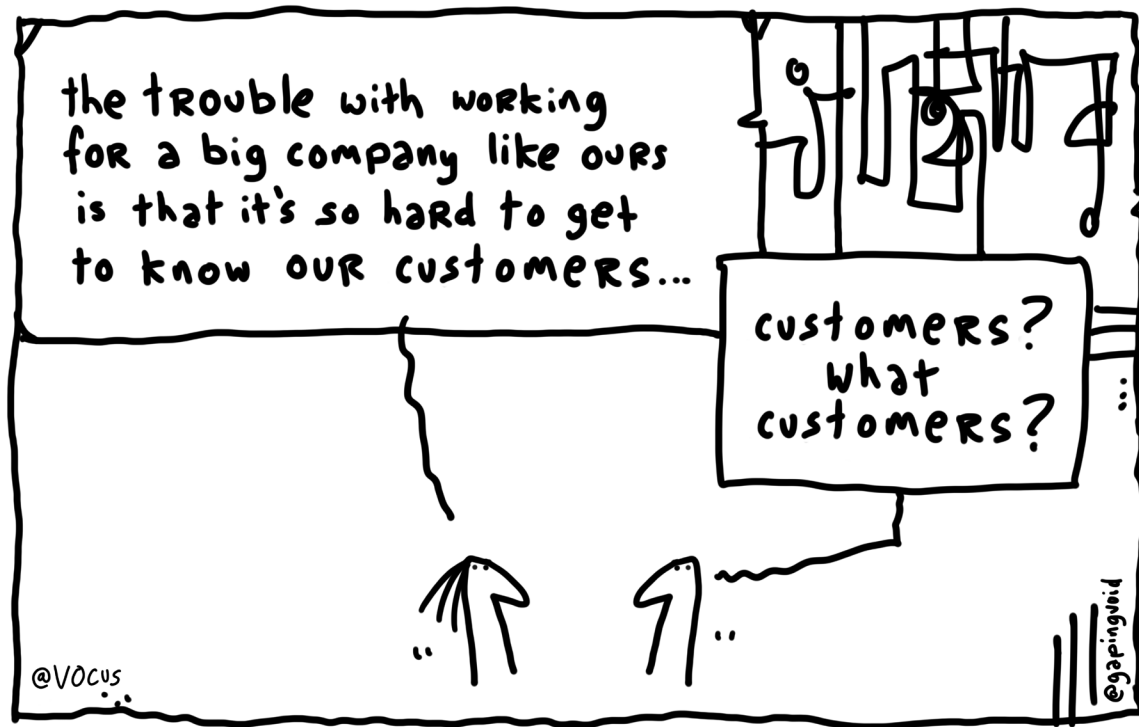
Indeed, it was too good to be true.

If it were that easy, anyone could do it.

Hi, my name is Brian. I'm amazing...as for meeting me?
You're welcome.

If relationships are about people, then customer engagement must focus on the very people we wish to serve.

Customer centricity starts by investing in a culture of putting the customer first. Technology then amplifies your purpose so that it creates and extends value to those seeking it.



The One Thing About Change Is That It Always Needs to Start With Someone Else.

At times I think about whether or not any of us are truly happy working within the confines of the marketing machine as it exists today. You and I know that it can be suffocating. We also know that it can every so often stifle creativity and innovation. But the marketing machine for the most part works. That's the problem. It just works.

We all want to change it.

Silos need to fall.

Budgets need to rise.

Resources need to multiply and extend our work.

What are we waiting for?

I wonder if we're waiting for someone else to rise up and make the case for change, creativity and innovation.

If there's one thing I've learned over the years, it's that the leadership team is not going to one day come to you and place you on a pedestal. They're not going to wake up and see the world as you see it.

Until they do. Get it?

In your heart and mind you know what's important. You know that investing in technology and scaling communications and marketing programs helps you reach more people. But once you have someone's attention, what do you do with it?

Each engagement is an opportunity to plant seeds that grow into relationships. That means you have to know someone, what's important to them, who they trust, and also appreciate their aspirations. Let it touch you. Let it inspire you.



Don't compete against yesterday's standards or metrics. Don't celebrate mediocrity. Don't benchmark yourself against the success stories of those who are disguising innovation and progress with a fancy new take on something that is still old and broken at the core.

This is a time to reinvent everything. And, you'll redefine success in the process.

**Change From Accepting
That Things Aren't Good
Enough the Way They Are;**

**It's What You Do About It
That Counts**

Team, we have a problem. So... our experts just learned that people don't like generic email blasts sent daily when referred to as "Dear first name." I guess we're going to have to use people's names. Now we actually have to get to know them (sort of).

Life is too short not to do something that matters.

People want to feel valued. You want to feel valued. After all, you are the very person you want to reach.

People want to believe you know them. You want to deliver value. The distance between the two is only separated by the steps you take to bring them together.



You Don't Even Know Me!

Time stands still for no one. The world is evolving. Customers are evolving. Our work isn't keeping up with the pace of transformation. There's no real sense of urgency. There's no real consensus on direction.

That's where you come in.

In the regular world, you are at the center of your own EGOsystem...I mean that with love. You are at the center of your universe. So, why is it any different when you get to work? The technology you use, the stories you weave, the strategies you develop - they're meant to engage and inspire people to feel something, do something.

Make your work count...every word, every image, every story, every product. Make it talk to and through people. Doing so brings people together. Coming together forms communities. Communities can change the world.

Imagine that!

What's the ROI?

It's the dreaded question. And you know you'll be asked a thousand more times in your work.

You have to make investments in people. You have to make investments in relationships. You have to make investments in technology to scale those relationships.

So, what's the ROI?

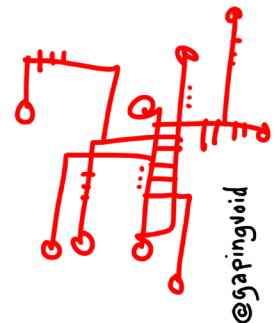
We know the R = return, so let's start there. What is the return we want and how does it convey value to us and to them? How could it represent mutual value?

Here's another question, what's the ROI if "I" stands for ignorance?

What is the
R.O.I. of
being human?

You get
to be
human.

@Vocus



Innovation Begins Within



A couple of years ago, Hugh MacLeod, the artist behind the Gapingvoid moniker and all of the beautiful artwork you see here, decided to bring together words and art. He's quite gifted in that his art and his words are equally brilliant. He's a best-selling author, too! But there was something in our approach that just clicked. You could say we're soul brothers.

A couple of years ago, we worked on one of my books and in the process, gave life to an image that we felt captured the essence of change and innovation. To this day, it's an image I can't live without. There, on a clean white canvas was a pink heart in the middle with just a bit of text pointing to it stating, "Innovation begins here."

Indeed.

Questions about ROI are important. Return on investment is a sound business directive. We need to consider why we're doing anything new in the first place and how it changes the value proposition for doing so, along with the value we carry forward to the communities we wish to engage, become part of and shape together.

There's always a return when companies focus on outcomes. There's a greater return when those outcomes align with mutual value. Mutual value doesn't happen by mistake. It's driven by purpose.

History shows that businesses that focus on a higher purpose outperform businesses that focus on the bottom line over the long haul.

I have this strange sensation. It's a weird feeling.

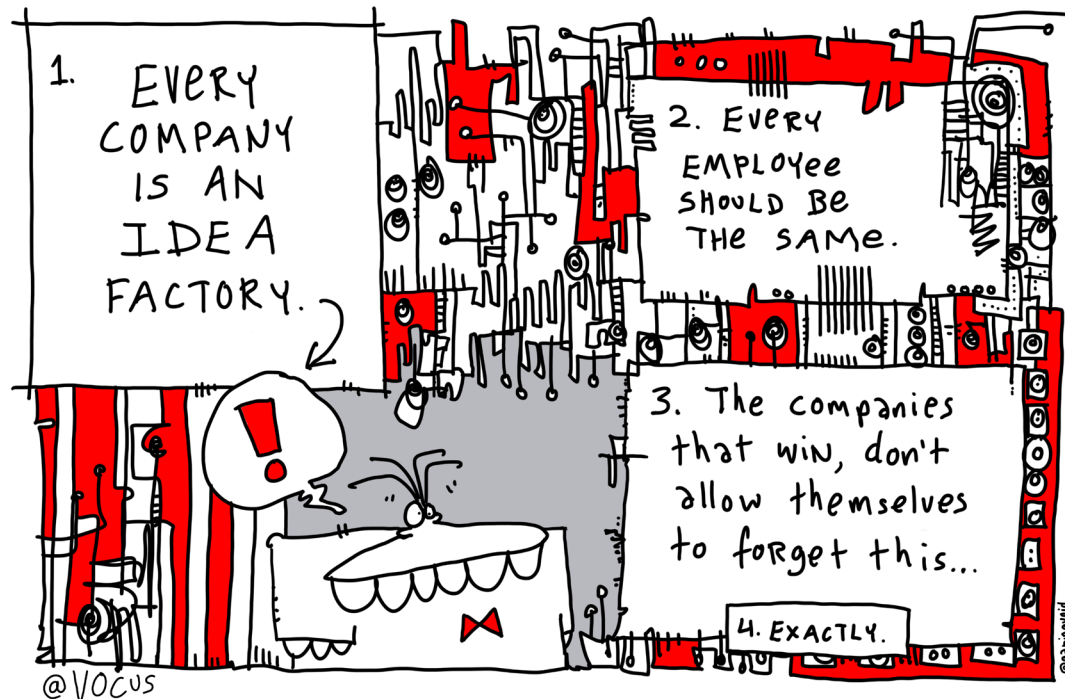
Wait...that's it: I've got an idea!

Don't wait for someone to tell you to be better at what you do or to raise the standard for excellence in your company. You are the catalyst. Change starts with you.

But, you have to want to do better. No amount of marketing will make a bad experience better. No amount of marketing will hide what it is you shouldn't see, feel or find.

Improve. Innovate from the inside first before you engage on the outside.

You just might find that when you strive for excellence it becomes contagious. People sense it and want to be part of it.



Ideas Are the Byproduct of Empowered Cultures

Any discussion of change is not without a conversation about culture.

But what is culture? What defines it?

Here's what it's not...fear. See, fear of taking risks or pursuing new ideas isn't culture as much as it's a consequence of mediocrity or complacency or both.

I don't know. Maybe all of these things contribute to a culture of its own...a culture of safety, comfort and all that's familiar. But in its own way they help us compete for the middle.

Culture is underestimated and underappreciated. It is often misunderstood or not understood at all.

Culture is the manifestation of collective achievements and the pursuit of common aspirations.

Technology doesn't define culture. Metrics don't define culture. Activity or busywork doesn't define culture.

You can't push forward if you give in to those who push back.

Persistence outlasts resistance.

Why should I care if you don't?

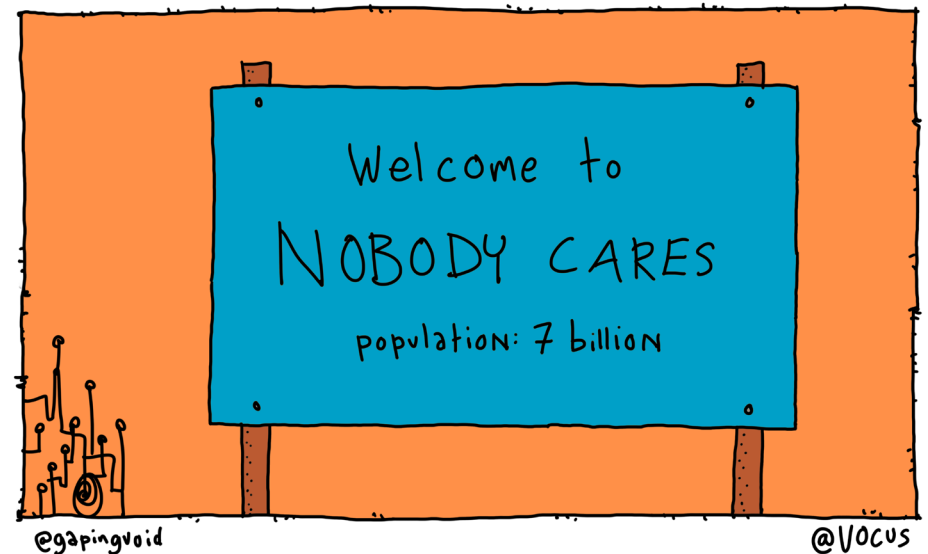
I know it seems like a brash question to ask. Things like mass email blasts, press releases, infographics, social media editorial calendars and the like say the opposite of thoughtfulness. They aren't intentional. And, if you work this way, don't worry. You're not alone.

Seriously, we have to ask ourselves, who are we trying to engage? Who are you writing for? For whom are we designing? When you think about it, you have to wonder if we write for the people we're really trying to reach and engage or is it really the person who is approving the campaign or paying the bills? It's all a bit absurd when you think about it.

Look, I know you care. You're operating within a model that was there before you. It's just that when you broadcast and operate against models designed to engage people in a different day and age, you unconsciously and unintentionally send more and more people to the land of "nobody cares." And, the population is growing.

This is where innovation comes in.

Don't compete for the moment. Compete for meaning. When you do, you'll find that people care because they want to...because you earned it.



Ignorance + Arrogance = Irrelevance

I once saw a comic that reminded me of how we unknowingly undermine our chances at greatness simply by not taking risks. It read something like this... “We think this is an innovative idea and it’s probably brilliant. We can’t entertain this though. It’s never been done before.”

How can we innovate if we’re restricted by fear? How can we lead if we’re relegated to the past or the middle?

To compete for the future necessitates that we start by competing for relevance today. If we don’t, others will. Where does that leave us? Eventually, it creates a community of “whatever” rather than a community of engagement. Who has time for that? No one.

What if we took chances?

What if we took risks?

What if we strived to add value at all costs?

What if we rewarded design thinking, risk-taking and even failure?

Things might be different. Things might just work.

Now that’s a community I would want to be part of...

So you're saying that the most direct route to customers is a straight line, not a complex maze of BS?

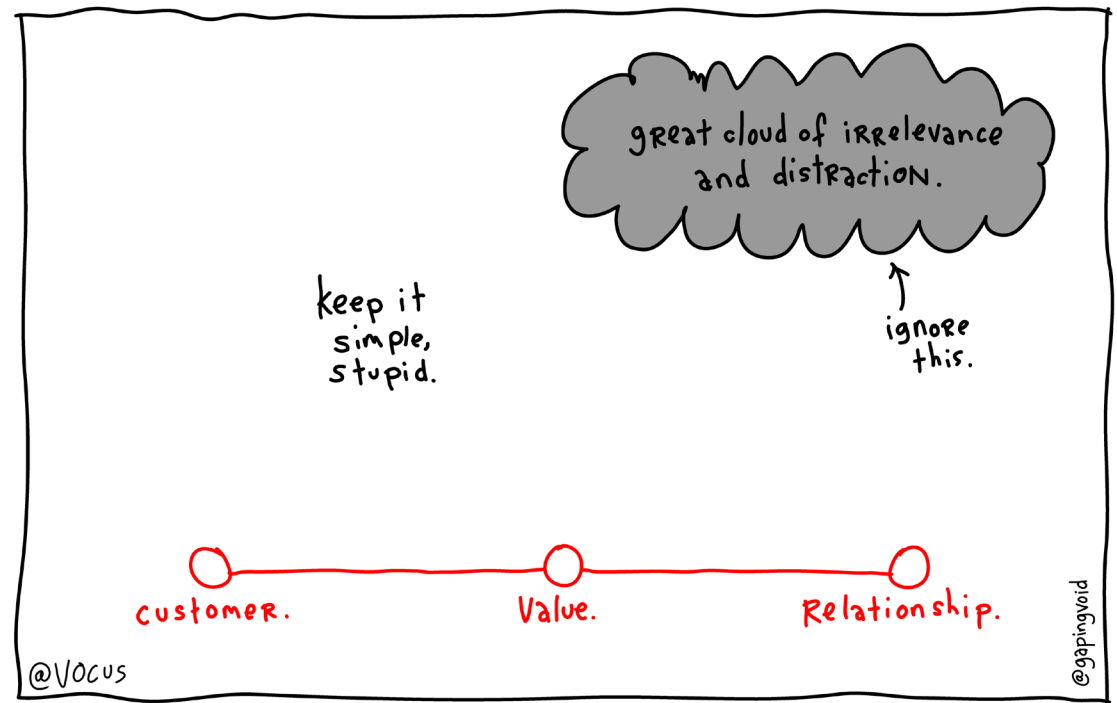
Like Johnny Cash, let's walk the line toward relationships, shall we?

Meaningful value proposition
-> empathy -> engagement -> relationships.

Seems easy enough.

You and I know that it makes sense... common sense. You and I also know that putting common sense into action is woefully uncommon or unpopular.

Start by articulating what relationships should look like. Describe how someone might talk about you when you're not in the room. There's your plan. Keep it simple.



If an Infographic Is Published and No One Shares It, Did It Even Exist?

Infographics are the new press release.

Native advertising is the new corporate journalism.

Snapchats are the new Instagram.

Vines are the new YouTube videos.

Instagram's Hyperlapse is the new Vine.

See the pattern?

There's always the next thing. The question is, so what?

It's how you use these platforms that defines your brand. It's how you engage people and inspire them to do something after engagement that defines your legacy.

Live your brand as your customers do. Let them, in turn, bring your brand to life in ways that inspire you. Technology should be invisible.

**Eureka, I've got it! I figured out who's going to win the next Super Bowl.
Wait, I'm supposed to use all this tech to learn about our customers, their preferences, expectations and goals!?**

Everyone is talking about big data. Everyone is going on about how it can foretell the future.

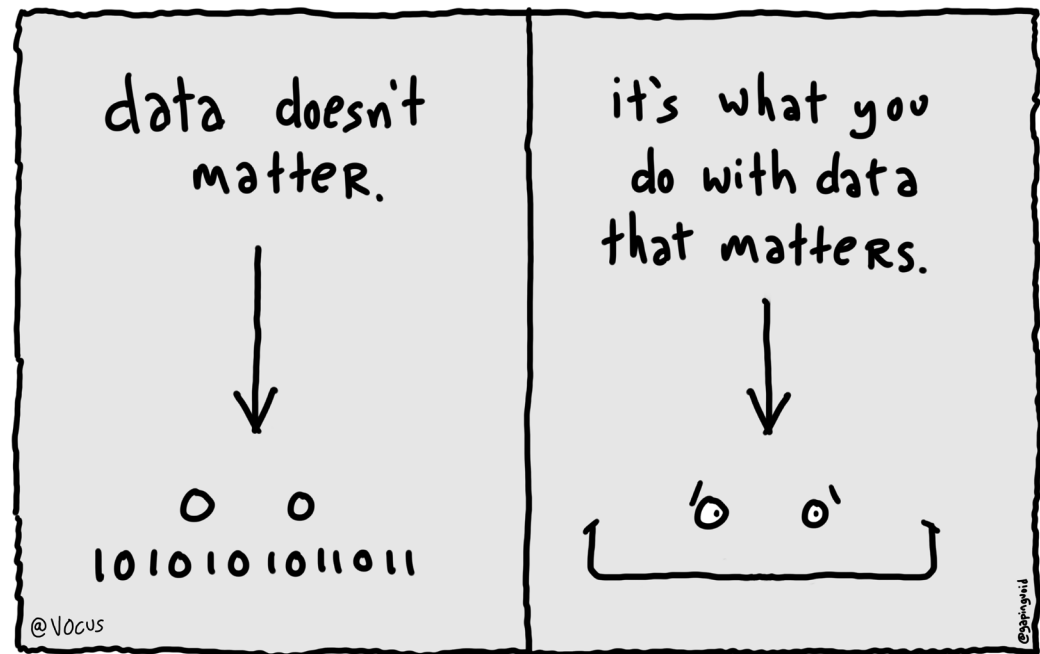
But when you look at how big data is applied to personalization strategies in marketing and service, you quickly realize that the promise of big data is more glamorous than practical reality. One study I read suggested that only one-third of e-commerce strategies were prioritized for one-on-one engagement. One-third.

Maybe big data is too big.

Maybe we need to start with small data so that we can make small steps toward big change.

Data should be translated into meaningful, usable insights.

Oh, and it should matter to real people.



Data Is Supposed to Humanize Markets

Data can be a disease. It tends to make people ignore it, or worse, suffer from analysis paralysis. Strategists would rather make decisions based on gut instinct. Obviously, the gut knows more than any amount of data, according to this rationale. Unfortunately, what we know and what we need to know is more counterintuitive these days than instinctive.

Our experiences are working against us.

Data is just the beginning. We need to build a supporting ecosystem that brings in data, humanizes it and inspires us to do things better. Big data must always tell a story. It must push us to do something meaningful, something special and something engaging. Otherwise, what's data for? Validation? Reporting? Hardly. Not in this day and age. Data is our barometer. It's our crystal ball.

Data must be human...think of it as human data for us to be more human in all we say and do.

The idea of human data is as important as or more important than data science. The ability to translate data into insights is just the beginning. Translating insights into actionable next steps is equally important. Managing execution is critical. But, using data to be more human...is priceless.

Data is more than a function or department. It's the very thing that gives technology new life and can also give our marketing new life.

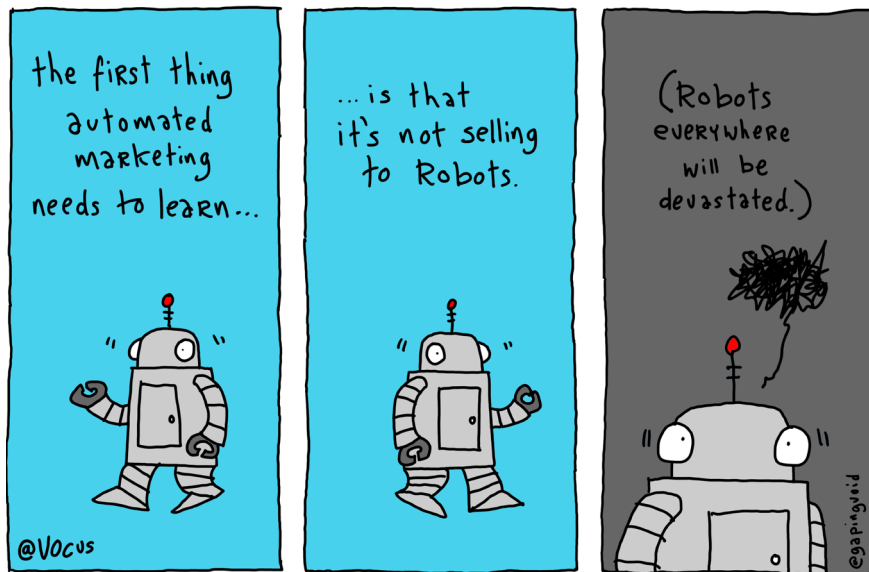
What's all the excitement about, Bob? Why is everyone in the office so happy? We just learned that we've been selling to real humans. Isn't that great!?

You get it. Now you have to help others get it. While everyone's talking about growth and scale you're thinking differently. You're scheming...developing a master plan to defeat the robots and bring people back into view. It's a bit like "The Matrix," isn't it?

Growth and scale are byproducts of investing in customer relationships – before, during and after transactions.

Yoshimi will battle the pink robots, but we know she can beat them. She needs help, though.

Technology is not about robots; it's about humans. We all have a center. Your "center" is driven by a higher purpose. You and what you stand for is that higher purpose. Find it.



“Oh Yoshimi, they don’t believe me. But you won’t let those robots defeat me.” – The Flaming Lips, Yoshimi Battles the Pink Robots Part 1

There is no one audience. There is no one persona. This makes us more valuable than ever before. Human engagement takes human beings.

The problem with automation is that it implies a broadcast or general approach to engagement. Doing so misses the importance of the very people we hope to reach and inspire. Without personalization, we become the robots we need to defeat. We can do better.

Even though we have the technology, we need to be more human in our work. Otherwise, what’s the real value of what we do? We become creative operators more than creative strategists and relationship experts.

I know you’re trying to make a difference. And, by trying, you will succeed. The robots won’t defeat us with you on the job.

**Robots Are
Stealing the
Jobs of Smart
Humans
Everywhere.
We Must Rise
Up and Defend
Our Place in
Marketing!**

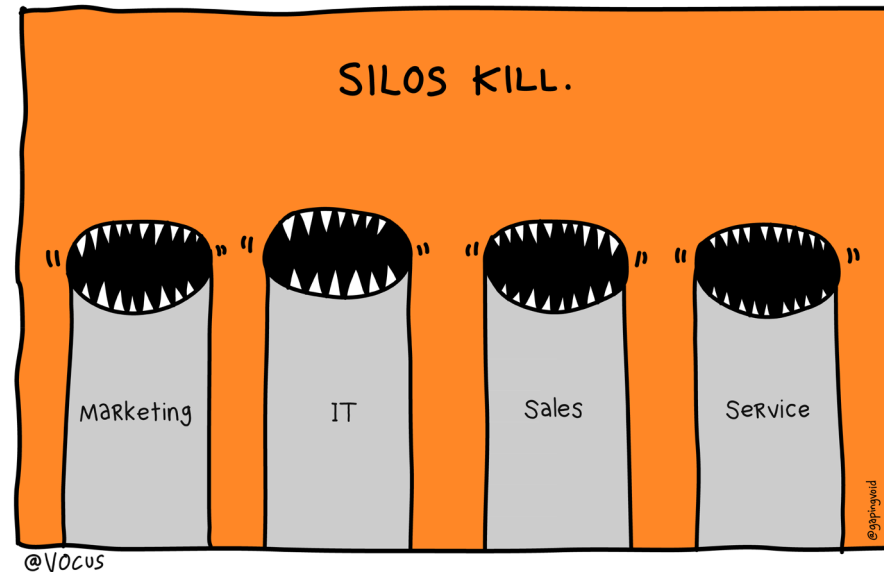
Public Relations Is Bigger Than Public Relations

Marketer: Hi, who are you?

Customer: I'm your customer.

Customer Service: Oh, hey guys! I was going to introduce you two, but I didn't know how to reach anyone else in my own company.

Marketer: Doh. I thought we had a 360-degree customer view in place!



Customers don't do business with departments. They expect to engage brands. But, when it comes to public relations, we tend to overlook the public and the relations with them.

Why is it that we, by the very nature of our business, force customers to deal with mini-brands, aka departments, aka silos? Working together creates better experiences. Period. So, let's work together.

One Does Not Just Tear Down Silos

Public relations is public relations. It's everyone's job. Someone, though, has to set the standard. Someone has to manage and execute against that standard.

There will always be micro-engagements. The problem occurs when these micro-experiences don't add up to the brand we build and market. By nature and design, silos create experiences that are compartmentalized. Each are defined and governed by their respective context. Marketing creates an experience as does advertising and PR. Sales creates an experience. Customer service creates an experience. You get the picture.

Someone now has to define a master experience and work with each group to contribute to this new experiential storyline. Do you even know what these individual experiences are today? Start there.

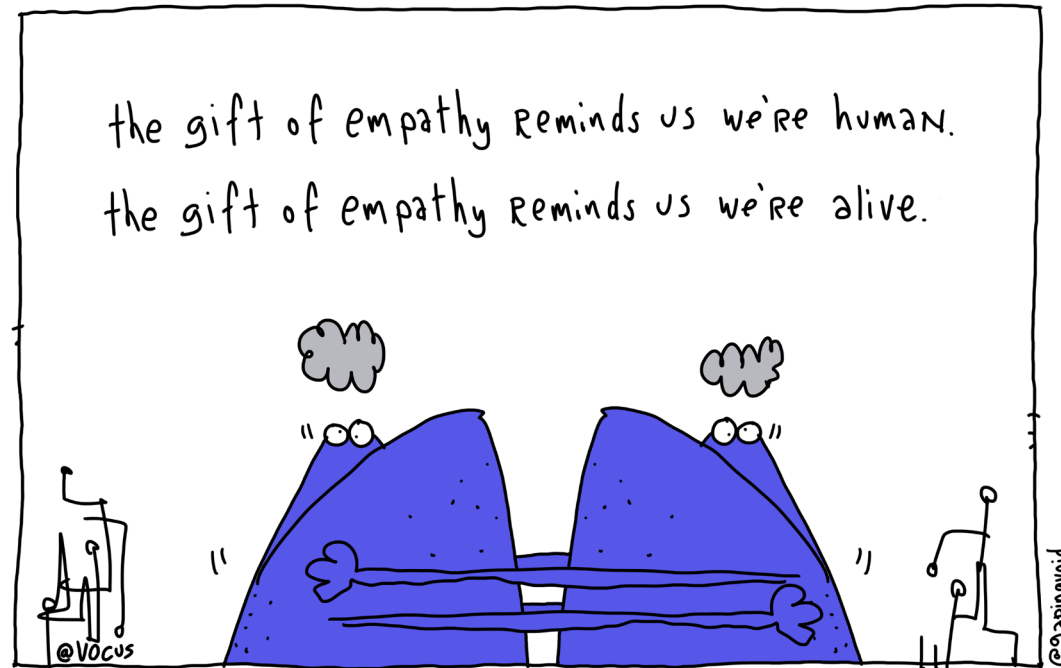
The thing about people is that we can't build relationships if we can't put their interests and aspirations ahead of our processes and politics. Public relations is bigger than the PR department. Engagement is bigger than marketing. Branding is bigger than advertising. Welcome to a new era of marketing and service in which your brand is defined by those who experience it. Know your customer, whomever they might be, in every scenario.

Every Business, Every Executive Needs an ‘Undercover Boss’ Moment

If you’ve ever watched the show “Undercover Boss,” you know there’s always an important moment when someone figures out what they’ve been missing...that’s the moment when someone is given the gift of empathy.

They’ll usually say they forgot what it was like to be a customer or to be an employee.

We could all use an “Undercover Boss” moment to remind ourselves about our customers and what’s important to them and why.



You Know Me... You Really Know Me!

That's what you want in life, right? You want people to know and get you. You want people to love and appreciate you. But what happens in a world when what you love and what other people think you love are different?

This is more true than you know these days. A new generation of customers, stakeholders, and well, everyday people are—at their core—different than you and me. What they value and how they think is often counterintuitive to what we believe or even what we see in the data about them. But that doesn't mean we can't engage them. We just have to try. And, try we must.

Just because customers are different doesn't mean they've figured everything out. Nor does it mean they're unworthy of our engagement. We just need to try, and trying starts with listening, empathy and appreciating the differences between ourselves and everyone else.

Behavior. Expectations. Preferences. Dislikes. Interests. Shared experiences. Each inform our stories, our content, our marketing, our products and services. Understanding each helps us earn a form of newfound relevance.

You get it. This is why you're the change agent. This is why you're the hero.

Because of you, we can make marketing matter again. Because of you, we can start to see the public for who they are and who they want to be. And, because of you, relationships become both a byproduct of meaningful engagement and also the new "R" in ROI.

I wonder if deep down we go along with our routine because it's safe and it's how we learned to define success in the past.

We can't expect everything to change overnight because someone swoops in to save the day. We can't wait for leadership to have an epiphany about the future of marketing and engagement.

No, that's not going to happen. It's not going to happen because the hero you're waiting for was actually you all along.

You're the one who gets it. You're the one who isn't satisfied with average or good enough. You have the vision to see what the future really looks like. You have the heart to do what's right and what's important. You have the strength to push forward when others push back.

Let everyone else say it's not their job. You know better. No more waiting...

Get your cape.



That's what this is all about...

PR = People + Relationships

In the end, people matter. Relationships matter. You matter. Technology only helps you reinforce this message.

Nothing is going to change overnight. And, that's cool. This is a journey. There's much to do. But none of this will happen without you.

Whether your customer is media, executives, stakeholders, employees, influencers or the very consumers who keep you in business, relationships are the pillars that define your work, your brand and your legacy.

We're in this together.