



You don't need water to drown.

“I wonder who it was that defined man as a rational animal. Man is many things. but he is not rational.”

Orson Welles

Growing up surfing on Australia's east coast, I'm no stranger to rips. For those unfamiliar, a rip or rip current (or riptide for those of you in the US) is a powerful current of water that travels sideways along the shoreline carrying water from incoming waves back out to the ocean. Some rips can move so quickly that even Olympic swimmers can't swim against them.

A few weeks ago, I was surfing at Treachery, a spot just south from Seal Rocks on the NSW mid-north coast, and one well known to many Australian surfers, when I saw a man in a rip not far from me who looked like he

was in some trouble. Having been in a few rips myself over the years, I knew the solution was to relax, ride with the current until it just peters out beyond the breaking waves, and then swim easily back to the beach. This guy clearly wasn't quite so aware.

Another surfer and I paddled over but this guy proceeded to wave us off, calling out. "I'm OK," as he resumed trying to swim against the rip. It was pretty clear this wasn't going to end well.

It didn't take long before keeping his head above the water was obviously difficult. He started thrashing about and yelling for help. Within a few seconds the face that arrogantly and stupidly rejected our help, had turned into one with sheer panic flashing across it. The other surfer and I again made our way towards him.

I will never forget that guy's face. First the look of pride in the face of a danger he didn't understand; then the panic when he realised what was really happening; and finally overwhelming relief as he grabbed my hand and I hauled him onto the front of my board – gasping for air and coughing up seawater.

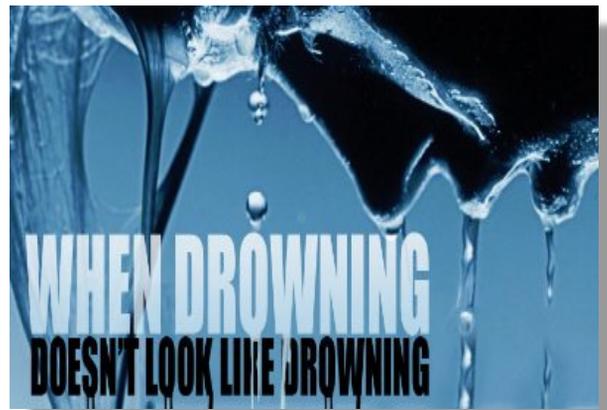
“Our human instinct for survival drives us to try anything that keeps our heads above the surface.”

In the last decade or so, we've seen many prospects go through that emotional journey from blissful ignorance to their own defining moments. For some, it's an “Ah Ha!” moment. For others, it's more like “Oh shit!” as the implications of their particular circumstances hit them like a brick in the face.

In conversations where one party is trying to change the understanding or behaviour of another, whether as parents or in sales, we've all witnessed first hand that point where the child or prospect acknowledges for the first time the risks or consequences you are trying to help them understand.

When my boys were teenagers, I used to get, *“I know Dad, I'm not stupid you know.”* In the business world, it usually sounds much more rational – bordering on arrogant. *“Yes, I am aware of the risks and I'm managing them.”* Which of course, is just code for, *“I'm keeping the status quo thanks very much”.*

This little drama played out again late last year over lunch with the CEO of an Australian software company. We were talking about the challenges she saw herself facing in the first half of the coming financial year, after having delivered a shocker last year. At one point in the conversation, she jokingly commented that she needed to do something different or her investors were going to be coming after her.



She went to move the now clearly uncomfortable conversation on, but I stopped her. *“In all seriousness, what's going to happen if you can't get more sales?”* At first she told me not to take things so seriously; she was only joking, but I refused to let her off the hook and sat there staring at her – waiting for the answer.

“Seriously,” I persisted. *“What's really going to happen?”* She looked off into the distance, then slowly back to me and stated, *“I'll be gone.”*

Sure enough, within 30 days, she was. She'd realised and acted too late. And then last week I saw that same look that I saw in her eyes that day in the face of the guy in the rip. Misplaced pride turned to fear and panic. And then, *“Oh shit!”*

Can you handle the truth?

At RPMG we love the concept of the Challenger Sale choreography – in particular Rational Drowning and Emotional Impact. We're frequently asked to explain the difference and how they relate to each other.

To the guy in the rip, rational drowning looks like treading water. Initially and for a while he says to himself and those around him, *“I'm OK,”* which feels true at that particular point in time. Only when he realizes that he can't continue that way for long, does he go from rational drowning into the domain of emotional impact.

This is not a place prospects will go willingly. It's very uncomfortable. They would rather stand outside of the story...their story...like a casual, disconnected observer, who can see things factually...logically, and yet remain unmoved, while mired in their own status quo.

Our role is to care enough about them to be willing to hit them with the truth – and not let them hide from it.

Resisting the urge to tell

In my story of the CEO who got herself sacked, I recognized that she was intentionally seeking to avoid getting deeper. I've seen her situation hundreds of times before and I know I'll see it at least a hundred times more. But just like paddling over to the guy in the water and saying, "You're in a rip you know...", her immediate response would have been defensive. She would've wanted to stay simply outside her own real story. In denial.

So I could have told her, "*You need to do something or they're going to shoot you*" and I would have been spot on. But asking her to recognise it herself – aloud, saying, "*I'll be gone,*" was always going to be much more powerful. Asking intentional, targeted questions allowed her to narrate her own story. People may well lie to others, but only sociopaths lie to themselves. Her admission to herself of the consequences, even though she said it to me, carried far more impact than anything I could have said – no matter how accurate I might have been. She had to find that reality herself. I just had to help her.



"People will lie all the time to other people. But only sociopaths lie to themselves. The power in rational and emotional drowning is in getting prospects to admit the consequences of inaction - to themselves"

Five steps for rationally and emotionally drowning your prospects - (respectfully and safely of course):

- ***Prospects will go for the surface***

Like a balloon filled with helium, so it is with prospects. They will overwhelmingly want to get back to the surface as sinking deeper into the centre of their own story feels like being buried alive.

- ***"Pain" is our friend – "comfort" is not***

If you are not prepared [and/or skilled] to respectfully lead prospects to uncomfortable places...to use the "Dark Side of the Force", you will continue to struggle with selling.

- ***Don't tell their story for them***

Numerous published studies show that people remember about 20% of what they hear but 80% of what they do and say. Monkey see – monkey do! Ask questions that lead them to tell their own story; don't tell them yourself.

- ***Ask targeted, directed questions***

Nothing is more maddening and exhausting to a prospect than questions that appear exploratory and aimless. Or worse, fishing expeditions. "Tell me about your business" might have worked twenty years ago, but not any more. Know where you are leading them with your questions. Done well, the journey will be compelling enough to hold them.

- **Lead TO - not WITH, your solution**

Your questions, when asked appropriately, should subtly open the prospect's mind to a new way of doing something. Don't jump too quickly to your solution – remember the guy in the rip. Until they know they're in trouble, they'll ignore you - whatever you say. They need to be prepped with whatever will resolve their issue. It's like a tease. Show them a little of what's behind the curtain, but not the whole thing. Position your product or solution – but lead them to it, so they feel like they get their by themselves. It's their answer by then – not yours.



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