

The Devil Doesn't Need Your Help

If there's one phrase that drives me crazier than "Let's not reinvent the wheel," it's "Let me play the devil's advocate."

Now, maybe that's because after two years of a nutty election season I'm done with listening to advocates, but I don't think so. Here's what happened while exploring how best to get my new product to market.

I found a local marketing and branding company that looked very imaginative, filled with insight and creativity and, generally, just very "with it." We used to say "cool." So I make an appointment and take my new product down to see these creative geniuses. It was just the right look, the bare brick wall so many agencies like to have, the LED lighting, wood floors, displays of successful campaigns. At the appointed time into the meeting room I go to meet a very warm woman who is the smiling facilitator of all new potential clients and a grumpy-looking creative director sporting the obligatory three-day beard and rumpled shirt. All three qualities apparently a pre-requisite to creativity.

Let me admit right off that not only did I have an early-stage venture, (marketing companies don't take well to early-stage ventures) but my product is somewhat disruptive, involving quantum energy and molecule clustering stuff so often not immediately understood. But I'm telling you it's going to change the world...well at least how people grow exceedingly better home gardens. It was a device that changes the resonance of the water used on the home garden.

No sooner had I begun to explain why that was so, I heard the phrase from the crumpled one: "Let me play the devil's advocate..." And off he went about how he doubted this product would ever work and how crazy it was to think anyone would want one. To her credit, the smiling facilitator said she'd like one because she's tired of feeding her kids chemicals, but that did nothing to stop the downward skid.

Here are my several points.

- 1) If you use that phrase, you're a coward...blaming your negativity on the devil. The devil has never had any problem putting up roadblocks and challenges to people's dreams. So he doesn't need your help. Own your own negativity! I'd much rather hear "Speaking for myself, your project sucks!" That's much more honest.

2) There is nothing wrong with seeing issues and challenges or even with skepticism. Magic actually requires dis-belief...and so does true innovation. One thing for sure: skepticism is better than a yawn! It's how you express it.

3) Turn your skepticism into an expression of curiosity. Curiosity is energizing and encouraging. Go from "The devil and I can't see your idea ever working" to "I'd love to learn more about that molecular clustering bit, I've never heard of that." People who are curious about my work win me over every time.

4) If you must advocate, advocate for the god of possibilities. 'What would be the potential if it did work' is a much better mindset. Imagine if this was the 1880s, and Alexander Bell, Charles Tainter and Heinrich Hertz came to an agency saying they were a start-up with an idea for how they could send messages wirelessly to each other over long distances through thin air. Would they too be met with skepticism from a grumpy creative director? I didn't even get the chance to tell this agency that 35 percent of all U.S. households - 42 million of them - grow some of their own food.

No matter what your dream, focus on the possibilities...and the higher the better. And most of all do not listen to the devil or his advocates!