



By Richard D. Czerniawski

CHOOSE UNCERTAINTY OVER CERTAINTY

Uncertainty is like a plague. No one wants to get near it. It is uncomfortable to the point of being terribly disturbing, wrecking-havoc on one's confidence in decision making. Uncertainty makes planning difficult, if not impossible. It disrupts the ability to move forward or move anywhere at all.

The coronavirus is an excellent example of the impact of uncertainty. At this point, we still don't know a lot. We don't how long the virus will be with us or whom it will strike or what the consequences of contracting the virus will have on our lives. We don't know if the schools will be opening in the Fall or when we will be able to return to our offices. Additionally, we don't know the fate of businesses and restaurants on Mainstreet or our jobs. Moreover, we don't know if and when we will have a vaccine or discover more effective treatments for those that are stricken by it. We just don't know!

The financial markets don't know either. They are troubled and racked by uncertainty. Investors detest uncertainty as it can reduce them to feeling like riverboat gamblers. It is no wonder the markets rise and fall, flip-flopping on any given day, by several hundred points.

Yes, uncertainty makes us anxious and seriously undermines decision-making. What is it that we should do during this time of uncertainty? We certainly don't want to commit errors that negatively impact our health, families' well-being, business, or careers. So then, what do we do?

There are many actions that businesses and marketers take during times of uncertainty. One is to do nothing because of the fear of making an error. After all, a critical marketing error can cause irreparable losses—real and opportunity losses. But, doing nothing exposes us to the "winds of the current situation," forcing us to ride out whatever we are facing like riding-out a ravaging typhoon at sea. As we have heard many times, "hope is not a strategy."

We may also go in search of more information. This is a noteworthy approach. However, we must be mindful that what we are seeking is simply not there, or one of our competitors has beaten us to the punch and captured an enduring, competitive positioning or precious market share. Then, too, what we learn may not prove fruitful, or the conclusions we draw are not consistent with the data.

Another is to "keep on keeping on." However, what brought success in the past does not guarantee success in a future that is no longer the same. The General, who fights the next war as he did the last, is likely to suffer defeat. Circumstances change, requiring different strategies and tactics.

Then, we seek comfort to reduce our uncertainty in the form of consensus, which can provide a false sense of security. We tend to view consensus—even the tacit agreement of others—as making certain that which remains uncertain. This is what can prove most damning. We hold to it as the correct answer to our problem. However, the herd instinct of the pack is to agree rather than challenge. Challenging makes others feel uncertain, which we feel must be avoided at all times. Moreover, it is difficult to assign blame when the company’s “best minds” (or one of the largest consulting firms to whom we paid millions) concur on an issue.

So, why would I encourage choosing uncertainty over certainty? Nothing is certain! Additionally, the rush to consensus shuts down “consequential thinking.” We don’t ask, “what then?” of proposed strategies and actions. Instead, we stop at the “right answer!” I’ve observed and commented many times that in corporations, the right answer is “the first executionally expedient answer that has consensus.” However, it is rarely the correct answer in the marketplace.

Maria Konnikova, author of *THE BIGGEST BLUFF*—about poker and decision making—appearing on the podcast *The James Altucher Show*, told the host that her mentor—Eric Seidel, winner of eight World Series of Poker titles and an inductee to Poker Hall of Fame—advised her to practice, “Less Certainty. More Inquiry.” He wanted her to create not only her own narrative of the game based upon the hand she is dealt, but that of opposing players to avoid committing errors and blundering her way into defeat.

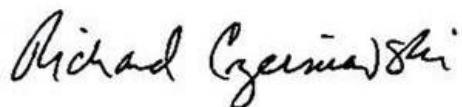
I, too, believe that we must challenge the feeling of “certainty”—even when we believe we have a treasure-trove of rich data—to improve our likelihood of success. We need to peel the proverbial onion with inquiry to uncover weaknesses in our strategies and actions, envision and create alternate scenarios, and engage in consequential thinking. Stated another way, we should pressure test our thinking regardless of whether it is our brand positioning strategy or elements in our marketing plan. Ask questions such as “then what,” “why,” and “in what case might this not work?” Dig deep.

Fight the feeling of certainty that often buoys a false sense of comfort. Choose uncertainty over certainty. Make yourself and your team uncomfortable by adopting the mindset of “Less Certainty. More Inquiry.”

Challenge your marketing to take it to the next level. Check-out my new book, *AVOIDING CRITICAL MARKETING ERRORS: How to Go from Dumb to Smart Marketing*. I share many learnings from my 48-year, and still counting, career in marketing management with some of the most successful companies and brands throughout the world. It will help you spot and avoid those critical marketing errors of omission and commission and, importantly, provide sound direction to help your marketing matter more. Learn more here: <http://bdn-intl.com/avoiding-critical-marketing-errors>

Stay SAFE and be well.

Peace and best wishes,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Richard (Gyermak) Shi". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.



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