

The wisdom in not knowing

 By [Mike Freedman](#)

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The most astute marketer I worked with did not train as a marketer: Carol Grolman began as a secretary, became marketing director of Edgars *and* then Woolworths. Instead of a head cluttered with Porter, Aaker and Ogilvy, she relied on her gut and was brave enough to trust her instinct.



Instinct is the wisdom we all have under the layers of junk we call knowledge.

Chiang Tzu, a Taoist philosopher and sage writing 2500 years ago, asked, "Why do we go chasing after knowledge when we don't know what we already know?" He distinguished between ephemeral knowledge - prevailing ideas - and the deeper wisdom that we often call intuition.

Intuition is a mixture of observation, generations of trial and error and our connections with the rest of humanity. It is our inner voice.

My biggest mistakes in life have resulted in not listening to this inner voice. When still in advertising we entered a merger with a big-name agency, despite my wife saying she didn't trust the agency head.

"Why not?"

"Because he doesn't smoke, but when a woman takes out a cigarette, he's the first to offer her a light from his gold Dunhill lighter."

Absolutely ridiculous, *I thought*; besides the lure of big household brands was too hard to resist.

The merger was a disaster, the true state of the company had been artfully hidden and while we lost what we had built up, Mr Dunhill retired to his game farm.

Writing the book

It is said that the middle-class home chef has 12 recipe books and knows, at most, 12 recipes. On my bookshelves there are a few dozen books on marketing and advertising - I would be hard-pressed to tell you more than one interesting idea from each.

Recently a client read a book that takes several successful American companies and retrofits theory to prove you have to be this, that or the other to thrive. While the companies quoted were unaware of the theory that made them successful, our client, who had created a half billion rand business, now wanted to follow the book's model. Our counsel? Successful organisations do not read the book, they write it. Books offer a compass - they are not the territory

A Zen novice, came to his master saying, "Teach me all your secrets, I must learn more."

The Zen Master continued pouring his tea, until the cup was overflowing.

The novice put his hand over the cup; the Zen master continued to pour, scalding the novice's hand. "Why did you do that?" the young man asked reproachfully.

"Your mind is like the teacup," the Zen master replied. "How can I put anything in when it is already full?"

A core part of Freedthinkers business is research and an issue we encounter is how to offer insight to a mind that is full.

Process of unlearning

Good research provokes. It is a process of unlearning - going beyond what you know to what you feel - listening to the quiet voice of inner wisdom.

Good research is also limited. I cannot know what you think or feel. Also, as in quantum physics, observation changes what is observed. All we can do, by aggregating responses and discovering golden threads, is to offer a view as seen through the eyes of others.

There is wisdom in understanding that the more we learn, the less we know and in respecting the quiet voice within.

ABOUT MIKE FREEDMAN

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