

THE SUPERPROMOTER

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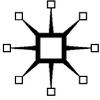
The Power of Enthusiasm

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PREFACE

There are times when I'm running a research company; sometimes I'm a table tennis player and at other times I compete in poetry slams. Apart from this, I'm a father, husband and – like everybody else – at times I'm consumer, client, patient, member of the public and traveler. The thing I've learned in life is that, to me at least, there is one thing that is highly important whatever role I happen to be occupying. It is enthusiasm. Anything I do is made different by the presence or absence of enthusiasm: mine influences how I am able to function; the enthusiasm of others can really get me going. We all know this: enthusiasm can be wonderfully infectious!

How people exercise influence on each other was always of interest to me. Back then it influenced my decision to study Social Psychology. Having duly completed my studies and done my share of applied life-exploration in the bars and pubs of Amsterdam, Rotterdam and Leeds, I did my military service in the Royal Navy. During my stint at the Ministry of Defence I was employed as a behavioral scientist, and from there I moved on to Blauw Research, which is a Dutch research company. My research involved customer relationships and employee motivation, and I got involved with research into company reputation, new-product launches and advertising campaigns. Having had all of these different experiences, I have come to a certain insight that I would like to share with you here.

WHAT IS MY INSIGHT?

That it is the transfer of enthusiasm from one person to another that lies at the foundation of a company's success. It is the force that fuels employee motivation and people's personal development. People can be infected with enthusiasm for all kinds of things, whether products, companies, brands, jobs, and so on. When others share in the enthusiasm, positive things start to happen. Conversely, if people's enthusiasm fails to ignite others, leaving them indifferent or even provoking resistance, it will soon be extinguished.

Enthusiasm was a recurring topic in hundreds of interviews my colleagues and I have conducted. Literally thousands of consumers answered our questionnaires, the employees from more than a hundred companies were interviewed, and the levels of enthusiasm existing among large public groups have been measured. Everywhere we ran into the influence of enthusiasm: on how people do things and of course on how they feel about doing those things. At the direct and personal level I've also experienced the compelling force of enthusiasm, from our clients, for example, but also from my colleagues at Blauw Research. As long as enthusiasm is greasing the wheels, all rolls along smoothly; but as soon as that level of enthusiasm runs low, everything becomes an uphill struggle. I always thought it odd, but I have not been able to discover much scientific research into enthusiasm's influence; it gets no thematic treatment in the management literature that I've seen. However, the existing literature did cover for example studies of copycat or, as it's sometimes called, Herd behavior, word-of-mouth behavior, as well as social networks, Web 2.0, Human Resource Management, and the role of influencing. There

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are any amounts of books for sale that attempt to explain company or marketing success stories. And yet my many conversations with entrepreneurs, marketing people and communication experts have only served to strengthen my conviction that the influence of enthusiasm lies at the foundation of success.

This book will be introducing you to the *superpromoter*. Superpromoters personify the power of enthusiasm; they are the enthusiasts who in sharing their enthusiasm around infect others with it. We come across superpromoters all the time. They are the customers making recommendations that bring in new customers; they are the employees who get really involved and thereby change the working environment; they are the members of the public who stand up to defend some government policy they strongly believe in. They are the backers of companies or government bodies, the people acting behind the scenes to ensure its success, whether that means sales growth, building a good reputation or creating more effective management. Of course some people end up as superpromoters more often than others, but all of us will be at one time or another. It is fair to say that everyone allows themselves to be influenced by a superpromoter sometimes. For most, it is comforting when someone we trust and take seriously tells us what to do, what to pick, what to go for... that way we don't have to reinvent the wheel each time. And it is a generally acknowledged fact that we are apt to make superior choices when we allow ourselves to be influenced by enthusiastic superpromoters. All of us also need superpromoters to give us self-confidence and to stimulate our creativity. They can show us what we are good at and urge us on to develop our talents further. Keep in mind: not only are superpromoters

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enthusiastic about products or companies, they can also be enthusiastic about us as individuals!

For example, while I was honing my skills as a performing poet – no doubt my most vulnerable role – it was the influence of superpromoters that made the difference. Without them, I would never have made it as a poet, I'm sure it would have all fizzled out in a hurry. The earliest poem I wrote during my last year in High School was inspired by my first lesson in poetry appreciation. After class I decided to risk writing one of my own; it was a sonnet on longing for the end of term. Looking back, today I have to confess that it wasn't exactly a masterpiece. Nonetheless, my teacher reacted with enthusiasm and encouraged me to publish my poetry in the school's newspaper. Soon after, during my first performances, it was the reaction from the audience that gave me enough confidence to continue working on my chosen art form: performing poetry onstage. When I submitted my poetry to publishers for evaluation, their positive feedback prompted me to publish a collection of my poetry. The first superpromoters of this collection rewarded me with a 'best-debut' prize; and just before he died, that most loved Dutch writer and poet, Simon Vinkenoog, wrote an inspired and most poetical blurb for the back cover. There is no denying this did wonders for the sale of my little book, turning it into one of the best-selling poetry collections published at that time – not that this means a great deal in Holland: total sales were around 1,500 copies! The point is, these superpromoters, during key moments in my budding career as a poet, handed me sufficient confidence to carry on. They helped me to get other people interested in my poetry. In becoming a table tennis player and in my work as a researcher, superpromoters played a comparable role.

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Probably you'll have had very much the same kind of experience. We all need a little encouragement from time to time...someone to encourage you to push on, regardless of what others might have to say. This book also would never have seen the light of day without superpromoters. Like good friends, they spent time looking at my efforts critically and firing up my own enthusiasm as I was making progress. That is why this book is dedicated to them! The Superpromoters!



FOREWORD DUTCH VERSION

SUPERPROMOTION

I have great respect for those who realise things that are greater than themselves: entrepreneurs, record holders, composers and, for example, writers. At an early stage I got the opportunity to read the manuscript of the book that you have before you now. Rijn Vogelaar, accomplished leader of Blauw Research, has outdone himself.

Aside from the daily hustle and bustle that comes with running a company and a family, Rijn found the time and energy to write a book about something that had preoccupied his mind for a while. “Why is it that some organizations or products become so popular over a short period of time and stay that way?” Surprised that the existing knowledge of marketing did not come up with a satisfying answer, he started his research. In this book Rijn describes the invisible mechanisms of social networks and he analyses the exact impact of influence. He uses the most recent marketing insights and brilliantly connects them.

Rijn concludes that behind the complex social reality of recommendation behavior and opinion leadership lies a key that has been missing in the way we think. And with the insight to that key he creates an almost completely fresh way of approaching marketing.

The superpromoter and his polar opposite the “anti promoter”, emerge unmistakably as the most important, but

yet invisible, forces behind the rise or fall of a product or company. A vast potential that, until now, has not been utilized by the industry.

He also agonizingly reveals that the current methods organizations use to improve customer satisfaction are ultimately counter productive. Creating, identifying and shaping superpromoters is the one new and clever way of marketing, according to Rijn. And I concur. Personally I think these new insights can lead to great implications for product development, marketing, management and research.

This is an impressive piece of avant-garde thinking, that might even put the Netherlands on the map within this field. I have said it before, sometimes people do things that are greater than they are. This book is a pleasure to read, and it will lead to new and useful insights for your business. I also wish it will make you an enthusiastic promoter of the superpromoter concept. In my case it has done just that.

Kees de Jong
Superpromoter and CEO of SSI and
co-founder of Blauw Research



FOREWORD

Hats off to Rijn Vogelaar! Well done...from this moment on, a plain recommendation will be just that...plain! Without enthusiasm, without passion, a recommendation is merely an opinion that may or may not be followed. Only a Superpromoter delivers!

I'll be honest, I started reading this book with a level of skepticism, thinking it would be yet another of the dozens of book out regularly preaching the importance of including customer insights into our business and how indeed the voice of our customer matters. But I must admit, I was quite blown away by so many different concepts Vogelaar throws at us.

From the perfect trifecta in how a Superpromoter impacts the world, to the more advanced Odilia concept, *The Superpromoter* is a joy to read.

When we meet enthusiastic people who can influence the world around them, share their enthusiasm about their experiences, they are the billboard and ads that we hope our marketing campaigns will yield toward market growth. That's the power of a Superpromoter.

In the movie *Untouchables*, Robert De Niro playing Al Capone has a speech that talks to the significance of enthusiasm. "man becomes preminent, he's expected to have enthusiasms. Enthusiasm..Enthusiasm...What are mine? What draws my admiration? What is that which gives me joy? Baseball!..."

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The words, admiration and joy in the speech, the way they convey the active experience are the make up of what Vogelaars' Superpromoters are all about...

I've spent a decade and a half driving customer centric change in major organizations, and I am now a Superpromoter of SuperPromoter. We hear acronyms all the time, but the ones in the book such as AM (animosity metric), SSM (Social sharing metric) and of course, as previously mentioned ODELIA should be on your list of "must know" terms.

The Superpromoter is game-changing! I know it's made me re-think my strategy!

Suhail Khan
Vice President Philips International
Head of Customer Experience and
Market Driven Innovation