



GRAVITY

The other law of attraction

DAN GREGORY

THE OTHER LAW OF ATTRACTION

I'm sure many of us saw Rhonda Burn's movie "The Secret" which talked about the Law of Attraction.

Some of us may have even thought, "I can do that", and constructed detailed "vision boards" of what our lives in the future might look like. Mine had me living in an apartment in Rome with a Maserati parked downstairs and Monica Bellucci waiting adoringly in the passenger seat (Hey, it could happen!!!)

However, I want to take a look at another law of attraction - Gravity.

I'm sure you've all experienced gravity in some form or another. Obviously, the fact that you're not floating off into the atmosphere is a form of gravity, but we all experience gravity in a social and business sense as well. It might have been a charismatic leader or a social movement that captured you, a product that drew your allegiance or a team or role that you felt passionately drawn to and a part of.

These are all expressions of gravity.

One of my favorite quotes is, "Gravity... it's not just a good idea, it's the law."

What I love about it is that it speaks to the universal application of Gravity, a law that is becoming more and more critical as our culture, values and economies change. Because, in business or any other endeavor, success is now largely determined by our capacity to attract followers, to keep them engaged and to align them to a common purpose.

What this really means is, how do we create cultures and communities of the willing, the voluntary and the enthusiastic.

FROM PUSH TO PULL

Traditional business models, sales and marketing techniques and management theories have a very top-down, hierarchical, “push” based structure. We push our staff, pester consumers with marketing, hit them with a hard sell and recruit or conscript people to our cause.

But today, the changes in our values, the market place, and the way we communicate and connect mean that these traditional models are working less and less and may, in fact, no longer be relevant (or even desirable).

We live with an abundance of choice - increased competition, affluence and the ensuing “expectation inflation” mean that pushing now drives people towards one of their many other available options. I’ve lost count of the number of managers I’ve spoken to who bemoan the lack of loyalty demonstrated by Gen Y. “They’ve no commitment!” they say. No, they’ve simply got other possibilities.

Marketers and sales teams also complain that their work is getting harder. We used to be able to interrupt people during their leisure time and bombard them with sales messages or badger them into signing with pushy sales pitches, but technology now makes it easier for them to tune us out, turn us off and look elsewhere. So of course, that’s exactly what they’re doing - we may all like buying, but no one really enjoys being sold.

And shopping around and comparative shopping just keeps getting easier. I recently downloaded an iPhone app that allows me to scan a barcode in store and shop around locally for a better price without moving. It’s shopping around without any “around”!

The problem is, push works really well when you live in an age of needs, but today we live in an age of wants. We don’t need to decide who we’ll work for, or the products we’ll buy, or the leaders we’ll follow based on function benefits or rationality or utility. So we no longer just need a product to do the job, or a job that pays the bills or a boss who has the EQ of a neanderthal because that’s the only size they make them in. Which means employees, customers, our partners and stakeholders are beginning to push back. Sometimes quite vigorously.

What this all leads to is, we need to stop relying on push, and learn how to pull - in other words how to create gravity.

The question is, how do you create a universal law?

GRAVITY = (MASS + PROXIMITY) x VELOCITY

OK, that's not a strictly accurate formula, but without wanting to give you a formal physics lecture, the formula for gravity essentially breaks down to a function of mass, proximity and velocity - the scale of objects (or ideas) are, how close together they get multiplied by how quickly they might be taken up of spread.

For example, the mass of the sun, which I think we can all now agree is the centre of our solar system, is in fact rather large and has a mass of such magnitude that it attracts the entire solar system (and the odd comet) by virtue of it's gravity. it "engages" the planets, which in turn engage their satellites and moons, and it aligns them all in an ordered fashion so that they each play a role but manage not to bump into each other.

In other words, it's about generating scale, building relationships and organizing systems in such a way that friction is reduced. Which is why it makes such a great metaphor for business in the 21st Century. We too are trying to attract, engage and align our organizations, our staff, customers and more broadly the communities we work in and serve.

Now, creating mass is relatively easy if you're a corporate behemoth like a Coca-Cola or McDonalds for instance, so their focus is understandably on building proximity. Coke once had a mantra to be "within arm's reach of desire".

Smaller organisations or movements however, may have great connections with a small core community but lack the scale to grow their gravitational pull.

More conservative and risk averse organizations try to control or micromanage both their staff and customers. so in many cases they actually increase friction.

So gravity requires different strategies for different systems.

INCREASING MASS

So how do we increase our personal mass (without visiting the drive through and opting for the super-sized option), and how do we increase the gravity of our organizations, our teams, our management and our sales drives and marketing? Here's a few suggestions.

- Partnership
- Contribution
- Vision

Partnership instantly increases your mass (even if it's only by one). But as we move into a world of increasing complexity and hyper-specialization, the need to collaborate and share information, systems and (gasp!) credit is critical, not just for gravity but to simply remain competitive. Which means moving from an individualistic model of business success to a more team based model of work and reward becomes a salient approach.

So rather than seeing partnership and collaboration as a touchy-feely nice to have, we might do better to instead think of what the combined contribution to the gravity of our cause might be.

Likewise, contribution helps us be a part of something bigger than ourselves. When we stop working from a mindset of "what's in it for me" and instead contribute to something that delivers for us, we upscale our impact.

Of course, the other thing all great leaders do is to create ideas bigger than themselves. Kennedy famously asked of the American people to question not what they could do for themselves, but what they could do for the nation. A big vision brings with it a sense of gravity. Ideas and words have the power to move people as much as physical dimension, which also leads nicely to...

INCREASING PROXIMITY

The second way to increase gravity is to increase proximity, to reduce the distance between the bodies in question. From a business perspective, there are a number of ways to do this, so let's look at a few:

- Communication
- Community
- Identity

Now, communication is the obvious place to start. Today, it's entirely possible to feel connected to someone on the other side of the planet and to use technology to reduce physical distance which also includes removing the walls between silos and departments.

When my business partner was working on a job in Brazil, she and I would Skype early in the morning and late at night, as one of us ended their day and the other's began. It was quite literally like having her sitting across the desk from me (a place she's occupied for the past 20 years). So communication increases proximity, but how do you scale it organizationally or culturally?

One answer is to build a community. Social networking extends far beyond Facebook and status updates like: "Just got my morning coffee" (and clearly have too much time). Social networking includes such business applications as mystarbucksidea.com and Dell's Idea Storm to name a few commercial applications of community based connectivity. Social networks that allow a passionate and highly engaged community to come together in an open source platform where they can critique, complain, build, collaborate and innovate on companies' behalves and just as importantly, evangelize for these organizations, creating some of the strongest pull there is - word of mouth.

What makes gravity really powerful though is when communication and community lead to a sense of identity - i.e. when you internalize the value and values of an organization or a cause or movement. Because if increasing proximity is all about reducing the distance an idea has to travel, internalizing the idea as part of your identity reduces that distance to zero.

When your staff or customers align their identity with that of your organization, the gravity around your cause becomes extraordinarily powerful.

INCREASING VELOCITY

The final measure of gravity is velocity - how both mass and proximity are affected by the speed at which both are traveling. In a commercial sense this has to do with how quickly your ideas, communications, new systems and indeed your vision are able to be taken up, implemented and shared.

So how might we go about increasing velocity?

- Certainty
- Decisiveness
- Accountable Autonomy

As I've already suggested, velocity is often a function of simply removing friction from a process, whether that be how easily you allow your employees to do their jobs or how simple it is for customers to give you their money.

One of the most important factors for either party is how much certainty you are able to generate. Doubt simply slows things down. People question the process, their capabilities, their judgment and ultimately your leadership and vision if you are unable to generate the requisite certainty to make things actionable.

Part of this function is delivered by decisiveness. Decisiveness is not simply the ability to decide one way or the other, but a capacity to communicate what has been decided with clarity. As much as people like freedom and not being put in their place, they do appreciate knowing where they stand, what the measures of success look like so they can frankly, get on with it.

Of course, this requires some accountable autonomy. This is as important for our people as it is for our customers. We no longer "own" our organizations or brands, they are co-created with those we interact with. What this is really about is setting parameters and expectations, then allowing people to bring the genius of their individuality to the table rather than prescribing how each stage of the process or delivery of value is achieved.

IN CONCLUSION

The truth is, we are all called to lead, our people, our customers, our communities and even ideas and change. However, there has been a seismic shift in the way we lead. This means that it is less about us, our ability to dictate and more about how we might attract, align and engage followers who are willing, voluntary and enthusiastic.

That is gravity!

So, without wanting to dismiss the key message of the movie *The Secret* too much, I would like to suggest that perhaps increasing the scale and the accessibility of your vision and making it easy to pass on or share is perhaps a surer model for success than a vision board.

Still, I still hope Monica's in the passenger seat when I go downstairs to get my car!

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Dan's specialisation is human behaviour and belief systems – our motives, our drives, the things that make us buy and the things that make us buy in.

Dan has helped develop new product lines for Coca-Cola and Unilever, invented new media formats for Murdoch Magazines, created interaction systems for categories as diverse as fast food chains and government departments and launched internal and external engagement campaigns for companies as varied as News Ltd, Vodafone and MTV.

He has worked as a director and lecturer at Australia's premier creative school, AWARD, lectures at The Miami Ad School, has taught post-graduate students at Macquarie and Sydney Universities as well as privately coaching and mentoring CEOs and non-executive board members.

Dan is a captivating speaker whose business acumen is matched by a rapier wit and rare human insight gained during a three year sabbatical working on the US and UK stand-up comedy circuits – skills put to great use in front of 1.4 million viewers as a regular on ABC TV's "Gruen Planet".

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