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Culture of Impatience

The world is made of up two kinds of people: Those who are impatient and those who don't know that they are!

Regardless of age, gender, education, or stature in society, it appears that we have transformed ourselves into busy worker bees enslaved to our impatience. This has affected every facet of our life encompassing our relationships, our parenting, the way we work and even to how we get our news.

When CNN is on, does the anchor, the ticker scrolling across the bottom of our screen, or the conversation we have on the phone, get our undivided attention? Do we get the subject in depth, or do we just grab the headline and assume the rest?

NPR is one of the few remaining sources of "10 minutes" vs. "10 seconds" analysis. How many of us listen to NPR outside of our cars where we are captive audiences? Those who have the time or inclination to read books or magazine articles vs. these quick multi-media flashes are quickly becoming the minority. When an issue arises that appears to have the public's interest, the news repeats ad nauseam, with seemingly nothing new to offer as if the media's idea of in-depth analysis is repeating the same headlines over and over. A quick look at what happened after Michael Jackson's death makes that all too clear. Why is this happening? The media is trying to appeal to the impatient masses that prefer short burst of headlines as opposed to in depth analysis.

This has affected our culture in more ways than one, and some of the effects will be seen later, especially since the younger generations' understanding (or lack there of) of world events and domestic issues is shallow and headline oriented. This is not limited to children. The silent scared shriek of the intellectuals was heard across the world when it was announced that the then president Bush does not read newspapers.

It seems impossible to battle the tide of impatience taking over our lives. While there are some who are not aware of it, others who are watching the changes as if it was a movie, a few are looking at ways to harness it and perhaps even turn it into a business competitive advantage.

Understanding Impatience is the Secret Sauce

As you design products and offerings for sale to the public, you can bear in mind that the more "intuitive" the product, and the less the learning curve for using it, the more appealing it will be. Just observe yourself the next time you get a new rental car. If you can't figure out the stereo, the air conditioning, or how the seats adjust in a less than a minute, odds are, you will not have a favorable rating on that car.

Knowing this behavior pattern is a competitive advantage. The challenge is that we can't keep offering the same old familiar products just to cater to impatience, since without innovation it is hard to sustain a client base.

Strike a balance between impatience and innovation:

- **Let intuitiveness be your operative word:** People often have patience when they can easily figure



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new things out on their own. In fact, an inherent self-satisfaction builds that translates to liking your product.

- **Have consistency in your offering** Once people have mastered one section of your product, they will just fly through the other sections, as they now consider themselves "experts" of how your product behaves. Feeling an expertise on a product brings about a natural affinity, and product champions get born.
- **Make your product attractive and interesting:** Interest is the kryptonite of impatience. When people are interested in something, they apply themselves to it, time flies and impatience is nowhere to be found. Even lack of intuitiveness can be made up with this interest. Arguably iPod was not that intuitive at first, yet it was attractive and interesting so that all flocked to it, learned it and it took over the world.
- **Cater your sales to the impatient:** One can imagine that impatience wreaks havoc on long sales cycles. If at all possible, devise ways to shorten the sales cycle, or use technology, online videos, and web-centric approaches for prospects to educate themselves on your products at the speed or timeline they are comfortable with.

Successful product designers are constantly balancing impatience, innovation, attractiveness and interest. Take Facebook for example. Since its interaction grew organically, almost every first time visitor took a few minutes of clicking to figure out how to put Facebook to work for him or her. Not exactly what you would call intuitive. However, enough folks have used it now, that its menu and interaction system has become the model for many new products. Entrepreneurs would rather work with an unintuitive, yet popular interface than risk fighting users' impatience. The fear is real. Even when Facebook improved their own interface, many lobbied to have them roll it back, since they did not have the patience of unlearning something they were used to. This behavior is, of course, much to the chagrin of user interface experts that fear bad habits can become the standard simply because people got used to it.

Dealing with impatience in your own business

Your team members are a part of the society, are not immune to impatience, and most likely display the same behavioral patterns discussed above. At work, impatience often leads to multi-tasking. On one hand, it seems like a blessing as we all have a ton to do and multi-tasking appears to produce more results. On the other hand, perhaps not enough attention is given to each task to produce the right results.

This problem is substantially larger for small businesses. As opposed to big businesses where many people perform the same function, in small business, the same person performs many functions, and often they are the only one performing it. As a result, should that effort not be done most optimally, the business will suffer.

When performing tasks, strike a balance between multi-tasking and dedicated focus:

- **Don't try to do it all at once:** Impatience just wants to just get it done with. So often people try to do all the work at once. Imagine if I handed you a stack of playing cards and asked you to rip them in half. If you are very strong, after exerting a ton of energy, you may be able to complete the task. However, if you ripped the cards one by one, you will have them all ripped in a New York minute.
- **Establish Uninterruptible Quiet Hours:** Have your team designate at least two hours per day, where they would turn off email, instant messenger, put their headphones on, and get deeply involved at the task at hand. When less interrupted, time will lose normal negative effect on your patience. It may seem at first that nobody can afford that, but the productivity you gain will make you a convert, wondering how you ever worked without it.
- **Don't fight the tide, do multitasking:** Multi-tasking can get you ahead. People are used to it and feel good when they multi-task. So don't avoid it, just harness it to your advantage. Multi-task for tasks that don't require thinking. For instance, if you don't have a system that automatically files emails in appropriate folders, as you are on the phone, you can do the filing.
- **Use technology to automate the work that tests your patience:** If at all possible, automate your processes that are repeated, leaving more time for innovative approaches. New processes spark the interest of the staff, and they will address them lovingly and patiently.
- **Meetings so all have to pay attention:** In collaborative efforts, communication is key. However, whether verbal or in emails, often communication happens correctly, however, for all the reasons mentioned here, the recipients do not pay enough attention to make it effective. Call 15-minute meetings. Any less than that may not get the message across, any more than that will have people's mind wandering. People are capable of giving their undivided attention for 15 minutes and as a result, you will achieve your goal of making sure all are in sync.

Be conscious of the looming damage that impatience and lack of attention is bringing to your business. Devise ways to measure and/or control it, and you will clearly have a competitive advantage.

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