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POCKET  
BOOK

# buy·ology

*for a* **Coronavirus** World

MARTIN LINDSTROM

New York Times best-selling author

MARTIN LINDSTROM

# Buyology for a Coronavirus World

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*For the millions of healthcare workers across the world.  
Not all superheroes wear capes.*

# Contents

<i>Foreword</i>	ii
<i>Preface</i>	v
I Another perspective	
1 Introduction	3
2 The amygdala in overdrive	5
3 Always look in the opposite direction	9
4 The world's first global 9/11	15
5 Am I going crazy?	23
6 The coronavirus playbook	29
II It is all about change	
7 In times of need, you can really make a difference	39
8 Your once-in-a-lifetime opportunity.	47
Afterword	54
<i>Footnotes</i>	55
<i>About the Author</i>	58
<i>Also by Martin Lindstrom</i>	60

# Foreword

By Stuart Crainer, co-founder Thinkers50

*Undercover Boss* is a popular TV series. The format is simple: a boss is disguised and sent to work at the frontline of the organization. The results are predictable and predictably entertaining.

In one show, the CEO of a chain of night clubs was dispatched to work at a selection of his clubs. He was surprised to find that young people drank themselves into a stupor or ER. He was even more surprised to find that the toilets at the night clubs weren't very pleasant at the end of a long evening. Along the way, as his eyes were opened to the reality of his business, the CEO met some of the exceptional people working for the company — cleaners, managers who do virtually everything, young marketers getting people through the doors.

Week after week, executives encounter the reality of their businesses and are surprised. This begs an obvious question: why don't they know what goes on in their business?

Perhaps it is a lack of curiosity. Perhaps they are trapped in

some sort of corporate comfort zone. Perhaps it is a lack of imagination, a failure to link the decision to sell shots in a night club for less than a dollar each and rampant drunkenness.

Whatever the reasons, it is inexcusable for executives not to understand the day-to-day reality of their business. Indeed, the most impressive and successful business leaders have an intimate understanding of the minutiae of their business. They also know that any organization relies on people doing fantastic things and going beyond the call of duty.

These lessons have been brought home to us during the Coronavirus pandemic of 2020. The heroes do not sit in corner offices on the 57<sup>th</sup> floor, they mop the floors. The heroes are different from those figures who are routinely lauded, applauded and very generously rewarded.

The heroes are people. Ordinary, but extraordinary, people.

None of this is news to Martin Lindstrom. He has been putting executives in touch with their customers for years. He has been reminding executives and organizations that the people they employ and sell to are human for the same length of time.

Martin is a fixture in our ranking of business thinkers, the Thinkers50, because he combines data, research and analysis with humanity. We have long believed that there is nothing so practical as a great idea and that management is actually a simple activity — so long as you don't forget the fundamentals of treating people with respect and listening to them.

Martin's track record of waking up organizations to the needs of their customers and of enabling them to think differently about the world is extensive and impressive. His work changes things.

I loved *Buyology* when it first appeared. It remains the best title ever for a business book! But, it was *Small Data* which really made me a fan. It was the obsessive attention to detail, the visits to nearly 2000 consumer homes across 77 countries, the nitty gritty of human behavior, what people want, what people need, what people aspire to.

*Buyology for a Coronaovirus World* makes sense of the new world order with the trademark Lindstrom attention to human detail and persuasive data. It needs to be read. Now.

## Preface

*“Though we see the same world, we see it through different eyes.”*

Virginia Woolf

I admit it. I’m crazy. I went on a holiday to Hong Kong just as the coronavirus hit the news.

While everyone was disembarking the plane from Hong Kong, I boarded the return flight. I found myself in an almost completely empty plane, getting used to a new world where facial masks were obligatory. The immigration was empty, the hotels were without guests, the streets were cleared of all signs of life.

I know Hong Kong extremely well. During the last three decades, I’ve passed through this amazing city hundreds of times. I’ve got to know the people and the soul of the city, both before and after the Chinese takeover. Yet this time something was different. There had only been one casualty in this city of seven million by January 2020, but the coronavirus had obviously taken its toll. The proximate cause? It boiled down to the facial mask.

Having worked extensively in Saudi Arabia, I had long thought about the impact of the obligatory abaya and headscarf worn by many women. I’d wondered about the effect of being cut off from anything but another person’s eyes on our ability to

connect. Now in Hong Kong, I became reacquainted with a waiter whom I'd know for years. Behind his mask, all his familiar facial movements were invisible to me. I realized that the mask did much more than minimizing viruses. It also eliminated empathy.

Empathy is a topic close to my heart. I've studied it for nearly two years while writing my next book, *The Ministry of Common Sense*, due out January 2021. I know, at first empathy might sound like a rather fluffy topic. You could associate it with cupcakes and crying children. However, the reality is remarkably different. I've come to realize that empathy is the very backbone of humanity. On a daily basis we may not think about it, but even the tiniest facial movement, invisible to the naked eye but detectable by our subconscious mind, has been shown to have a profound impact on our ability to connect with other people. In fact, when mothers were asked to maintain a stone face in front of their baby, after only a few minutes the baby would launch into such a severe tantrum that it might last for hours. Studies even show that mothers who use Botox lose emotional connection with their children — all this, because of the loss of visual signs of empathy.

I realized it was that feeling I'd lost, as I walked the streets of Hong Kong. It was extremely unsettling. Losing the feeling of empathy was scary, to say the least.

According to a U.S. study among more than ten thousand teens, the degree of empathy has dropped by a whopping 50% over the past decade. Accompanying this lack of empathy, we've also witnessed a spike in suicide rates; multiple experiments confirm

this surprising connection.

I'm writing this because the profound, unsettling feeling I had in Hong Kong, and which later spread to the entire world, is likely to define the future. The coronavirus will be long gone, along with its facial masks. There will probably be other global epidemics, but I'm not thinking about them. What I am thinking about is the loss of empathy caused by our change of lifestyle.

What happens when we're on our phones all the time, rarely looking up? What happens when our one-year-old's first step is recorded not by our eyes, but through the obligatory smart phone screen? What happens when we take six seconds to judge someone on Tinder, or when our fashionable EarPods are a fixed barrier as we scream to the world: *F...k off*? What happens when we only have 280 characters to express our true feelings on Twitter, or we polish our Facebook profile to such a degree that we aren't recognizable in it anymore, though it's perfect for the world to aspire to?

We lose empathy. We don't notice the loss, of course. It happens slowly, almost imperceptibly, just like placing a frog in a pot of cold water and turning up the temperature. Toss the frog in boiling water, and it would reflexively leap to safety — but turn up the temperature slowly, and the poor frog never realizes.

Empathy is what created the human species as we know it today. It's our imaginative ability to place ourselves in the enemy's shoes or predict what the bear will do, seconds before an attack. It's our ability to nurture and care for each other, rather than sliding into an online rage.

Yet that feeling of empathy, for which I once knew Hong Kong, seemed gone — replaced by fear and facial masks. A frightening trend which now, months later, seems to define large parts of our planet. How will this influence the way we live and breathe? Impact our hopes and dreams? And for you dear business owner; how will this change our Buyology in a Coronavirus World?

|

## Another perspective

*“The world as we have created it is a process of our thinking. It cannot be changed without changing our thinking.”*

*Albert Einstein*

# 1

## Introduction

*“In times of great change, it is not the strongest or cleverest that survive,  
but the ones most adaptable to change.”*

Charles Darwin

With people’s confidence about their health at its lowest point since the Great Depression of the 1930s, what product — besides the obligatory personal protection equipment and food — do you think might beat all the odds and not just survive, but thrive, during the global pandemic? (Hint: it’s not something you would normally talk about in polite conversation).

Give up? Here goes: There’s been a worldwide rise in sales of condoms, sex toys, and related products[1].

Sales of toilet paper are up 60 percent in the U.S. in April 2020, compared to the previous year[2], but greeting cards[3], lottery tickets, alcohol (spirits are up, but Champagne sales are down

- go figure!), coloring books[4], cigarettes[5], and cardboard games[6] have also witnessed a remarkable spike.

People are also stocking up on weapons[7]. Not to forget: Netflix has added another 16 million subscribers in just three months[8].

It's all about self-preservation, or — as the American economist Alan Greenspan dubbed it after the 2008 financial meltdown — “irrational exuberance.” Intent on satisfying our primal urges, people have temporarily lost sight of a commodity's true value.

Welcome to The Coronavirus Pandemic.

## 2

# The amygdala in overdrive

*“Fear doesn’t exist anywhere except in the mind.”*

Dale Carnegie

By now, everyone is familiar with the pandemic caused by the coronavirus, the virus that originated in China and quickly spread worldwide. We’ve witnessed the collapse of one health-care system after another, businesses struggling to survive, and millions of people losing their jobs. Today, it’s a new world for consumers, businesses, and brands.

All around the globe, we’re waiting for a green light to flash back on, signaling that we can all escape from our isolation, breathe the fresh air, hug someone we love ... and return to buying the same stuff we used to without having to run a constant radar alarm in fear of bumping into some sneezing person who has no intention of backing out of your safe zone.

But most experts agree: That green light won't be switched on anytime soon.

The world's economy *will* eventually recover, even if it takes a few years, but I'm convinced things will never be the same. Most of the reasons for that will be found in our primal brain, how we act and live under a cloud of fear.

I'm sure you've already wondered why toilet paper was in such demand as the crisis rolled through our nations. I mean, the answer obviously isn't that we decided to go to the bathroom more during the pandemic.

Rewinding time, peeling all the layers of civilization off our brains — the corporate hierarchies, our desire to secure Facebook likes and YouTube followers, our smartphones and consumerism — we'll discover a much different muscle memory in full action. Our primal instinct for survival set one particular region — our fear spot, also called the amygdala — into full overdrive. We faced the fear of running out of food, being forgotten, and dying alone.

Does any of this fear, panic, and thrift sound at all familiar? It should. Many of us were born of parents who came of age during the Great Depression and in the World War II era. As children growing up in more abundant times, we probably found it odd when we observed our parents' thrift, obeyed their requests to turn off the lights when we left a room, watched them re-heating leftovers, or saw them re-using tinfoil. My own auntie always nicely folded used Christmas paper, then recycled it for next year's presents. Some Christmas paper lasted up to a decade!

The truth is that, living in a time when a majority of Americans were forced to make do with less, our parents and grandparents saw first-hand the illusory nature of good times and bad times, of confidence and catastrophe. *This could always happen again, and without warning, too!* That was a message that got seared into our forebears' brains. In fact, I'm of the belief that each and every generation will experience at least one major crisis, helping to define who we are and who we aren't. It may seem unfair, but we picked (or got picked by) COVID-19.

### **The fear of ... everything**

A friend recently asked me a rhetorical question: Why is COVID followed by the number 19? It's because there have been 18 COVID viruses prior to this one, she continued, staring into my eyes with a twist of fear. And there are a lot of numbers following 19, she reminded me. Of course, she'd overlooked the fact that the 19 actually indicated the year the virus was first identified.

This fear, growing and spreading faster than any other emotional driver in our minds, is amplified by a constant fear of being struck down by the virus. No, not just the fear of getting sick (which for sure is prominent for many people), but more the consequence of being excluded from our tribes because we're suddenly labeled "COVID-19 infected." Sound farfetched? Well, you may indeed, unknowingly, have already been seduced by this very thought pattern. Be honest. Did you ever cough or sneeze over the past weeks or months? Was anyone near you? Or did anyone you know do the same — just to immediately thereafter roll out a longwinded set of excuses that you or they for sure didn't have coronavirus. In fact, you were 100% healthy: "Don't be concerned. I'm healthy, that was just a tiny cough,"

you caught yourself saying — while trying to convince yourself, along with every other person on planet Earth, that you for sure didn't have it and never contemplated getting coronavirus.

Well, here are the facts. Unless you happen to be among the 125 people per million who've been tested for COVID-19, how did you actually know — given that at least 25% are asymptomatic, that the virus spreads within a radius as large as 12 feet, and that it sticks to metal surfaces for more than three days?

How are you at all able to make that claim with any certainty?

Because our reptile brain, petrified of being excluded from our tribe, dictates that we say so. Just as people in the 1980s hid their HIV status, or (without making any comparison) people until recently were ashamed of wearing hearing aids or using inhalers, or to this very day are ashamed of wearing a colostomy bag — it all extends back to a deep inherent fear of being excluded from our tribes and the fear that we'll be left by our own to die alone. We fear “senicide,” the phenomenon (among the Inuit) of leaving their elderly on the ice to die. It was common, or was believed to be, everywhere from the Nordic countries to Italy, India, and Japan. Hundreds and even thousands of years later, the fear still sticks with us, even though I personally haven't seen anyone flipped off a wall or left on the ice because they're old.

# 3

## Always look in the opposite direction

*“The eye sees only what the mind is prepared to comprehend.”*

Robertson Davies

### **We are all out of balance...**

While doing research for my last book, *Small Data*, visiting nearly 2,000 consumer homes across some 77 different countries, I made a discovery with far-reaching implications for how we potentially observe ourselves and the world. We're all out-of-balance, and our constant mission is to recover that balance. Putting on our commercial glasses, we see that the gap between being in-balance and out-of-balance represents an opportunity for a new product, brand, or service. It may be that I'm overweight (and Weight Watchers is the answer), or I feel alone (should I try match.com?), or I feel insecure (meet Tony Robbins). Those deep-rooted drivers (all fitting neatly in the bottom of Maslow's hierarchy of needs), some may argue, loom as an underlying subtext in our daily behavior, subtly impacting

the truth and lies about what we do and why we buy. So why is that side of the story so essential to understand? I mean, aren't COVID-19 and its aftermath as simple as any other recession we've witnessed so far, a simple matter of people having less money and thus spending less?

The financial crisis of 2008 may reveal some lessons worth dusting off, as we seek to understand the true consequences of COVID-19 and how business should deal with it. My science team and I learned, in essence, that we should avoid viewing the world through a lens of panic (and thus, by default, adopting a linear approach); instead, we learned to dig deep into the human psyche for underlying behavioral patterns, and then to adjust business strategies accordingly.

What we learned was: Don't react to the panic itself. Rather, seek to understand and deal with the panic's root cause. Seek to understand our imbalances.

During the 2008 bailout by the U.S. government, almost every major American car company lowered their prices — with very little effect on sales. Meanwhile, South Korea's Hyundai decided to investigate the underlying cause of the crisis. Hyundai's consumer research program made an incredibly valuable discovery.

Hyundai found that consumers still had the funds to buy a car. But, uncertain whether they could count on their jobs, they were avoiding any unnecessary spending. In response, the company launched Hyundai Assurance. Their ads read: "Right now, buy any new Hyundai, and if in the next year you lose your income, we'll let you return it." Sales went up by double digits.

And how many cars were returned? Lee Myung-Bak, Hyundai's new CEO (who joined the group in 2008) told me: "Five."

### **Always look in the opposite direction.**

Let's revisit the "out-of-balance" theory.

I'd suggest that most of us have felt unbalanced during the past few months. It might be fear of isolation, uncertainty, insecurity, or a feeling of loss. Identifying those imbalances has led us to discover what I call "small data" — seemingly insignificant observations about people's lives — which, in turn, have the potential to create the foundation for new products and services.

At the moment, we're enduring isolation and lack of human contact, and chances are high that we're entering not just a global recession, but a global depression. Of course we're out-of-balance.

But this, in turn, points toward new opportunities. In order to understand them, we need to understand our underlying drivers, our sub-conscious mind.

### **Let's get in touch**

Eighty-five percent of our daily behavior can be categorized as irrational, leaving only fifteen percent to our rational behavior. Imagine this as an iceberg, with only the top visible for anyone at sea to see and the majority, hidden under water, balancing the tip.

I'm sure, at this stage you're disagreeing with me. At least, you're saying the rest of the world may be irrational, but don't

label me as one of the irrational ones.

But have you ever been in love? Or are you married? Tell me: Did you pull out a Microsoft Excel spreadsheet, just to check the stats of your partner, his or her ideal height, the Pantone color of hair, mood swing statistics. Of course, you didn't do all that before proposing.

Our irrational behavior comes across in every aspect of our lives. As far as I can tell, the subtle knock-on-wood has absolutely no impact; it's just inherent superstition, which we always try to avoid. How come, when watching television, realizing your remote control is low on batteries, you press extra hard to squeeze the last charge out of the remote?

The ironic thing is that our irrational behavior isn't isolated to you and me. Rather, it's to be found in every aspect of our society. Just look at share prices during COVID-19. Are they rational or irrational? Or the historic negative crude oil price, due to a sharp drop of air and road traffic (yes, you read right: sellers are paying to get rid of their oil!). Yet you and I know that planes and cars will soon be operating again, and they'll be using fuel. Irrational, anyone?

By understanding our irrational behavior, businesses can avoid the seduction of panic-driven solutions. Instead, by understanding the invisible shallow landscape of the human psyche, they'll navigate the rough waters.

### **Imagine that three billion people went to prison...**

One of our inherent fears is loss of our personal freedom, also

called imprisonment. The judicial system, when it wishes to punish an individual, imposes isolation, disconnection from our friends and colleagues, banishment to a locked space, loss of all physical interaction with the world.

So far, three billion of us have just experienced it.

Not much of a problem, you may be thinking — until another inherent dimension of our reptile brain realizes that this is going to result in lack of touch. Because with all this, we've ceased touching anyone, shaking their hands, hugging people, patting them on their shoulders, getting patted on the shoulders — things we took for granted.

Some years ago, a Dr. John Benjamin carried out a series of experiments at University of Colorado Medical Center. He gave two groups of rats identical tools for survival: food, water, and a secure living space. The only difference was that the rats in one group were stroked and caressed, while the other was largely ignored. The result? The petted rats learned and grew faster. Touch, the study showed, is a key for survival.

As I wrote in my book *Brand Sense*, the word “touch” encompasses a world of meaning. We try to “stay in touch” with friends, and we “lose touch” with others. People are partial to the “personal touch.” All terms linked straight to sensory signals and stimuli that our tribal membership is still intact.

Here we are in the year 2020, and I haven't touched a soul! Well, I actually have, but I can count the people I've touched on one finger!

Here's the issue. Visually we're fulfilled, perhaps even full to bursting. Yesterday, I found myself in front of a screen for nine hour-long conference calls. Back to back. After finally hanging up, I experienced this empty feeling of loss. I'd spoken with a lot of people, even laughed at times, yet I felt as if I had viewed the world through a one-way focus-group mirror. I sensed that I had observed the world, but never really participated in it.

If you ask the Japanese, they've formed a strong opinion about the topic after years of observational studies, quite a few of which include senior citizens. Studies conducted in senior homes across the country found a direct correlation between lack of touch and depression — and, with that, life expectancy. The less the seniors made use of their sense of touch, the earlier they would die. In typical Japanese fashion, they invented a special tool for the sole purpose of extending life: a robot dressed up as a fluffy, cute baby seal. It allowed the seniors to pet away, compensating for the lack physical contact with their busy, absent relatives and friends.

## 4

### The world's first global 9/11

*“When you come out of the storm, you won’t be the same person who walked in. That’s what this storm’s all about.”*

Haruki Murakami,

All of us remember 9/11. You remember where you were when you heard the news, who you were with, the first person you called.

Yet, I’m pretty sure you can’t remember what you had for dinner at your last birthday celebration. In fact, as far as your recollection goes, that dinner might as well never have taken place.

What’s the difference? Antonio Damasio coined the neuroscientific term for it. He called it “a Somatic Marker.”

A friend of mine always steers clear of escalators. They terrify

him. One day I asked his mother why. She told me that when her son was six years old and visiting a department store, he witnessed a little girl ascending bare-footed on the escalator. She stumbled, and a second later, the jaws of that great iron thing had clawed away part of her big toe. Sure, consciously, my friend knows the chances of getting his own toe cut off on an escalator are infinitesimal, but the incident was so shocking to him that his relationship with escalators would never be the same.

We often talk about somatic markers — bookmarks or cognitive shortcuts — that forge powerful associations in our brains. Well, for consumers everywhere, that's exactly what the current recession has created. One big Negative Somatic Marker linking sickness and social gatherings to the massive sense of fear and uncertainty that has wracked the world.

As a result, the very thought of leaving our house automatically triggers fear and anxiety. And remember, as sophisticated as many of us believe we are in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, we're not all that far removed from primates, who, in times of fear and stress, devote their lives to taking care of their most basic needs: food, health, sex, and survival. Hence stocking up on condoms, groceries, hygiene products, and weapons.

This goes a long way toward explaining why, in an atmosphere of global apprehension, American consumers are investing in things that will protect them from harm. A recent neuroscience study has shown that fear is a far bigger driver than most of us admit (blame the amygdala, that small region of our brains responsible for generating and storing fear). We're experiencing

fear of becoming ill, fear of losing our jobs, fear of not being able to make our kids' school or college payments, fear of our spouse or partner leaving us (domestic violence has been up nearly 30% in California during COVID-19)[1], fear of ending up broke, drunk, and homeless on the streets — and, of course, fear of death. When we're operating in survival mode, fear becomes a major driver.

And it's an incredibly powerful driver. Consider how, in 1964, Democrats broadcast the “Daisy” TV commercial, which threatened voters with nuclear annihilation if Republican candidate Barry Goldwater was elected[2], or how, in 2004, George W. Bush rolled out a fear-based TV ad depicting wolves crossing the U.S. border as stealthily as terrorists[3] — our amygdalas went wild. Voters expressed their distaste for both commercials, yet brain scans showed that the fear tactics worked. When push came to shove, they favored (and said they would vote for) the politicians who would best “protect” them.

### **Today's Somatic Marker**

A similar flare-up in our amygdalas is happening today. Only today, our fear is less about the threat of nuclear warfare or terrorism, and more about our loneliness, lack of purpose, and exclusion from our tribes (as the world rushes ahead online while you desperately search for “where the party is happening” but can't find it) . In this uncertain and unstable healthcare climate, we are, quite simply, scared to leave our homes.

As I discussed in my 2008 book *Buyology*, a Somatic Marker is a psychological process that controls your decision making, an emotional bookmark so powerful that you'll never forget it. A

shortcut to survival, it bypasses logical considerations when you — say — bump into a tiger in a jungle. A thoughtful evaluation of whether to pet the tiger is not an optimal survival strategy. The Somatic Marker says: *Run!*

This may explain why 9/11 had such a profound impact on how we live today. When we travel, we simply accept grumbling under our breath at TSA, taking off our shoes in Security, packing our tiny shampoos into ridiculous plastic bags, and keeping a watchful eye out for suspicious people and bags. After 9/11, mall traffic went down, surveillance went up, and debates about immigration skyrocketed.

But the reality by now is that another 9/11 has arrived. It's a Negative Somatic Marker called "coronavirus." Alarmingly, given the impact COVID-19 has had on our daily lives and routines, the coronavirus's long-term consequences are likely to be just as profound as 9/11 — if not even bigger. They'll be different, but they'll still be enormous.

As part of the *Buyology* study, we used fMRI to scan several thousand consumer brains, with the sole objective of understanding our subconscious behavior. And this is where the amygdala once again seemed to play a fundamental role in what is happening right now in front of our eyes. The amygdala seems to come into play in association with Negative Somatic Markers.

Whereas my research team rarely came across the amygdala a decade ago, in the last few years we've noticed this region firing up more and more frequently. Test subjects increasingly show activation in the amygdala when they are online, especially

when they hear politicians talk. Security, crime, fake news, personality theft, sexual harassment, food poisoning — even the loss of one's phone — all activate the amygdala.

The scary part is, we've learned that all this is cumulative. The more we're exposed to fear, the more fearful we become. This is true even when there's no relationship among the various fear-generating topics. Our scientific results support the theory that fear, if it is profound enough, becomes a Negative Somatic Marker. This points to one conclusion: Just like 9/11, coronavirus is causing a major behavioral change in our society.

The victims? The airline industry, cruise ships, malls, department stores, concerts, bricks-&-mortar retail, sporting events, restaurant buffets, every kind of business that depends on crowded spaces. These venues once seemed permanent, reliable elements in our lives, but with the hit of a Negative Somatic Marker, they are likely to be changed and replaced ... forever.

As much as we love those places, the Negative Somatic Marker we've installed in our brains over the past several months is likely to have a powerful, lasting impact on how we behave. We're likely to shop differently, touch the shopping cart differently, visit fitting rooms differently, touch elevator buttons differently. And those are relatively trivial changes. Consider train stations, airports, political rallies, and demonstrations. We might call it a paradigm shift. In many cases, it will weaken and even replace entire industries and institutions.

When it comes to malls, stores, shopping, and entertainment, the coronavirus can be counted on to escalate the replacement

of conventional bricks-&-mortar models with digital. As the *New York Times* wrote on April 21, 2020: “The sales of clothing and accessories fell by **more than half** in March, a trend that is expected to only get worse in April. The entire executive team at Lord & Taylor was let go during the month of April 2020. Nordstrom cancelled orders and put off paying its vendors. The Neiman Marcus Group, the most glittering of the American department store chains, is expected to declare bankruptcy in the coming days, the first major retailer felled during the current crisis.... Very few are likely to survive.”[4]

Old industries will collapse, as the space they once dominated is completely redefined.

Here’s the fact: the amygdala is like a chronic disease. Once you’re infected by it, not only will it be with you forever. It is likely to grow.

But we’ve discovered over the years that fear contains yet another dimension, which may go a long way to explaining the state of the world right now. Fear amplifies and spreads fake news.

Consider this: In 2009, just five years after the invention of Facebook, 2,000,000,000 (yes, that’s *two billion*) people were infected by the swine flu (also called the H1N1 virus), and some 203,000 died[5]. Do you recall a global frenzy? There was a lot of concern, of course, but I don’t remember a worldwide panic to match this one.

One of the reasons for our current global panic may be social

media. In addition to social media, another answer may be found in Hollywood. Think *Contagion*, *Outbreak*, *Black Mirror*, *The Rain* and many of the James Bond movies (like *Moonraker*). They all employ a narrative remarkably similar to what's happening right now. Make a quick count, and you'll find more than 40 blockbuster movies promoting the idea of a global pandemic. And yes, if you're wondering, those movies were all hitting the top of Netflix's most frequently searched for and watched movies during the peak of the pandemic. One might say that, long before the coronavirus had truly arrived, we'd watched dozens of "trailers" promoting it, preparing us all for a state of panic and stimulating our amygdalas.

Don't get me wrong, I'm in no way, shape or form dismissing the severe impact of the virus. I'm saying all this because, seen in perspective, some might argue that there's a limited correlation between the coronavirus fatality rate and our reaction to it. Yet in a world fuelled by fear, where a term like "panic scrolling" has become the norm, with social media on overdrive and a steady stream of 24/7 news feed on television — all streamed directly to the devices in our hands — with Hollywood trailers amplified by personal and public news ... all this may (just may) be a root cause of the global situation in which we find ourselves. We may have unknowingly activated a sleeper cell of fear in our brains, a narrative that's been seeded over decades, a plot that seems all too familiar.

Our brain possesses multiple centers that are capable of many different tasks; but the amygdala is unique, as it contains just one unique skill. It overrides anything and everything we do or even contemplate doing. It is like an emergency

breaker switch, no questions asked, applying little or no logic, paralyzing everything else.

Worst of all, we're all hardwired to respond to fear this way.

It's just a matter of time. The coronavirus will eventually fade away, but the frightening reality is that the emotional impact of the virus is likely to remain, infusing itself into our subconscious minds. It will create an even shorter shortcut, ready to take over the next time something fearful happens.

## 5

### Am I going crazy?

*“A bend in the road is not the end of the road...Unless you fail to make the turn.”*

Helen Keller

So, what are the personal consequences of all this? Okay, I might be speaking more about myself than about you, but like me, over the past couple of months you may have noticed that you're "dropping balls" — right, left, and center. Your routine responsibilities may be going undone, as your to-do list gets longer and longer — even though, theoretically, you now have all the free time in the world. You may be making mistakes you never would have made before. I know I am.

Am I rambling here?

In a 1998 study[1], Roy Baumeister demonstrated that laziness often correlates with exhaustion. He invited two sets of students

into a lab and, on a table, offered two bowls. One bowl was full of freshly baked chocolate chip cookies, the other contained a bunch of radishes. He asked members of one group to eat the cookies but leave the radishes alone; he asked the other group to eat the radishes, while skipping the cookies. The researchers left the lab, hoping the test subjects would be tempted to cheat. Would the radish-eaters sneak a cookie? Or, perhaps less sadistic, would the cookie-eaters be tempted to eat a radish? None of the subjects failed the test, and that's the end of the experiment — except for one small detail.

The researchers next asked the subjects to solve a logic puzzle. Unknown to the subjects, the task was designed to be impossible to solve. The researchers simply wanted to see how long the volunteers would persist before they gave up. This is where the surprising result appeared.

The cookie-eaters tried to solve the puzzle, and tried and tried for an average of 19 minutes before giving up. The radish-eaters, on the other hand, lasted just eight minutes. Why this huge gap? The answer may surprise you. The radish-eaters had used up their reserves of self-control, resisting those delicious cookies. It turns out that monitoring our own behavior is exhausting.

This explains why, when we come home from an exhausting day at work, we're more likely to snap at our partners. It also shows how difficult it is to handle multiple challenges at the same time. Just imagine if you were to be on a diet, exercising, learning a new language, and changing the hand you use when brushing your teeth — all at the same time. Sounds exhausting, right?

That's exactly what's happening to all of us, right now. Deeply engrained habits, intrinsic to who we are and how we behave, are all up in the air. I've talked to people who tell me their daily lives have turned into one gigantic blur. They find themselves eating breakfast at 2 p.m. and dinner at 3 a.m., working on Sundays, running meetings in their underwear. They're doing all that while avoiding shaking hands, avoiding friends, avoiding people, washing their hands twice an hour — and then once again, just to be sure. They're obsessively cleaning door knobs, water taps, car handles, the steering wheel ... not to forget tuna cans, the milk carton, and plastic wrap. And they're doing this all at once.

That's when we drop balls.

As straightforward as all these things may seem — I mean, how difficult is it to wipe a door knob? — yet add it all up, and we've become psychologically exhausted. On the surface, it sounds oh so easy. “You just have to be careful, stand away from people, and remember not to shake hands.” But underneath the surface, we're rewiring our entire behavioral patterns. The reason why I — and presumably millions of others — are dropping all those balls is not because we're lazy, but because monitoring our behavior has us exhausted.

Psychologists argue that the most stressful situations we encounter in life are divorce, the death of someone we love, and moving from one home to another. Well, now they can add a fourth experience to the statistics: the pandemic.

Today's experts are in agreement. The pandemic will have a profound, long-lasting impact on us. Here's my take on what is

likely to happen. Sadly, it's far from good news.

### **We'll all get fat (in fact, we're already getting fatter by the day)**

We've never gained as much weight as we have in the last few months of 2020, and nothing indicates this trend will change. The industry term for this is "Mindless Munching." We're eating on autopilot. Experiments show that when rats are under severe stress, they eat more. When we humans are tired, our craving for dopamine causes us to eat more. And when major changes take place ... yes, you got it right: we eat more. Thus, the post-coronavirus prediction is simple. We'll see a major uptake in eating and everything that comes with it. Cooking programs, diet books, healthy living courses, diet programs....

### **Did I mention divorce?**

Domestic violence has increased threefold in certain U.S. states since self-isolation kicked in. Close proximity to our family members, the lack of routine, and the temporary closure of churches are major factors. Don't laugh: Rituals and routines have defined us for thousands of years. In fact, on average you and I execute more than 350 routines and rituals daily. The latest estimates indicate that we've changed 40% of these due to the crisis. No big deal, you may say — but it sure is. Experiments with chickens show that changing feeding routines leads to violence among the chickens — after only two hours! The conclusion is simple but scary: expect the divorce rate to skyrocket after the coronavirus.

### **What's my purpose in life?**

With all that, we'll wake up to another reality, another view

on life. Many people have realized what loneliness means. Many are already heading full-on toward depression. We have plenty of time — some may say, too much time — to evaluate ourselves, our lives, and our future. I mean, there's only so much Netflix one can watch. And with that, we'll re-examine our role in the society.

Some will use this time to their advantage and rebrand themselves, so to speak. They'll use the coronavirus as a second chance to create a new self-image, to get a second chance for a comeback.

The perceived value of money will also change. We'll ask ourselves: What is money worth, anyway, if we can't use it? As a result, we'll most likely see people living fuller lives. We'll see a rebound of the bucket-list: more daring sports and adventures, parties, holidays, and quality times with friends and family. We'll be basing our existence on a simple principle: We only have one life, so what the heck?

The boss may have figured it all out. Video calls and virtual meetings cut costs in half and doubled productivity. But if you're the boss, don't be fooled. We were more or less forced down this digital distance-management track, but once the coronavirus has departed our planet, a much bigger virus will capture many of us: the fundamental questions, our purpose in life, at work and at home.

During their disastrous cyberattack in 2018, one of my clients, Maersk — the world's largest shipping company, responsible for 21 percent of global trade — learned the importance of

visibility. For the first time in living memory, top management began walking through the offices twice a day. No longer invisible behind their computer monitors, they became human and shared their personal vulnerability. They re-infused a sense of entrepreneurship into the organization.

We're coming to realize that socializing is the fuel of happiness, at home and at work.

Yes, sure. We survived the virus and learned the efficiency of a 100% digital lifestyle; but as appealing as it first seemed, something was missing. We need that something — our craving for a physical sense of belonging, a desire for human connection — at any price.

## 6

### The coronavirus playbook

*“You never change your life until you step out of your comfort zone; change begins at the end of your comfort zone.”*

Roy T. Bennett

#### **A change for good...**

Personally, I think the pandemic has one fantastic silver lining.

Wait! Before you dismiss me as crazy, mean, or incredibly insensitive, I mean that only in the sense that it woke us up to the fact that many of us were overly absorbed in our fast-paced world.

Technology is wonderful, of course. I’m not denying it. How could we possibly survive this crisis without it? And yet, when I walked to the beach and noticed kids playing on the street, for the first time in years, I saw them laughing as they ran, without holding the obligatory screens to their faces. Odd, when

you think about it. Maybe for the first time, they'd been given unlimited access to their screens, and yet they'd chosen to leave them inside while playing on the street.

Birds have been occupying my balcony. That's a first since I moved in. I even saw a fox crossing the road in broad daylight. I honestly don't think I've seen a fox since I was a child. I noticed the smell of fresh air, rather than the tang of pollution. A global study released April 2020 by the Swiss company IQair shows that the [air quality in Los Angeles](#), a city notorious for its polluted air, is now among the [best in the world](#) (L.A.'s pollution has dropped a huge 51%); this feat would have seemed impossible before California's stay-at-home orders, issued a few weeks earlier[1]. And as I swam in the sea, I overheard guys fishing from the pier discussing how, for the first time in decades, they could see the bottom of the harbor.

Having the opportunity to slow down time and re-evaluate our spending, our relationships, our priorities, how our business operates is surely a painful but necessary corrective — a reorganizing principle of sorts — to the way we were living. Now we are compelled to change, improve, and innovate, to find more creative ways to approach consumers.

But will it last? Will our newfound drive for innovation stick? Will our new Somatic Marker continue to override our brain's need for stability, squashing our instinct of conservatism? Or, the second the economy starts to recover, will we return to our old ways?

## **The coronavirus playbook**

Some years ago, a strike shut down the London Underground, forcing commuters to discover creative new routes to work. On average, they actually saved six-to-seven minutes per trip. But for a new routine to “stick,” it needs to be practiced for several weeks, or even months; any shorter, and new behavioral patterns don’t become permanent. The strike hadn’t lasted long enough, and within 48 hours, 95% of commuters had returned to their old habits[2].

If the current crisis lasts a significant length of time, as it promises to do, we’re likely to see lasting change. Certain businesses may vanish forever. Open buffets in restaurants may disappear, and crowded dining rooms may be a thing of the past. Other concepts will replace them.

### **I can confirm — change is good!**

Quick. Mention one industry that hasn’t been affected by technology. Just one!

Running this question through my mind, I figured I’d better turn to something totally basic, so much a part of our daily lives that we don’t normally give it a second thought. Toilets, I thought. I mean, a toilet is a toilet, right?

Well, it turns out that was wrong.

TOTO, headquartered in Japan, migrated — just like Apple — from one core expertise to another. Their latest behind-the-scenes innovation is a toilet that samples the user’s feces and urine and sends the data for analysis on a daily basis. Not only

does it catch potential life-threatening diseases, but the toilet (yes, the toilet!) analyses your immune system and creates daily recommendations for vitamin intake. Through a separate device, it will send this information to you each evening[3].

And that's a loo!

Here's what's fascinating. Even before COVID-19, we should have expected change everywhere, in every industry, in every function and every job role.

The best evidence for the constant nature of change, I think, is the churn rate of S&P companies. In 1964, the average tenure of companies on the S&P 500 was 33 years (according to Innosight, an analytic organization). By 1996, it was 24 years. By 2027, it's forecast to shrink to just 12 years. The same study (admittedly one year old, which seems like an eternity) predicted that at that churn rate, half of S&P 500 companies would be replaced over the next ten years. And that prediction took place pre-COVID-19[4].

Working in the transformation of companies and brands around the world, I've learned that change is a constant. But even beyond this, I've learned that we fundamentally hate change.

In my presentations, I sometimes ask, "Who likes change?" Seven out of 10 participants raise their hands. But I don't believe it. When push comes to shove, I'm convinced that fewer than 10% of us actually like change.

If we love change, wouldn't the numbers have been dramatically

different? So where's the gap taking place? The answer is likely to surprise you. In my opinion, the gap isn't necessarily a company's ability to adopt new technologies — though that, for sure, would have an impact. The gap is increasingly taking place between the organization, its employees, and its customers.

In the “good old days,” customer needs were imbedded into every successful company's very DNA — often because the founder, who had identified the opportunity in the market, was still around. Then, however, the essence of that culture, the tight connection between company and customers, had gradually crumbled. It would be parked in some “customer research department,” often reporting to another function which, yet again, would report to someone else. Box ticked, we're still listening to the customer! But the problem is, the functions that are doing the listening rarely have P&L responsibility. In the larger scheme of things, they lack internal respect.

Sure, they spit out one report after another, PowerPoint presentations full of fancy graphs. But over the years, attention to customer needs drowns in other priorities and cost cutting. It ends up as a two-man show, located somewhere in the basement.

Recently I went out into the field, aiming to detect how big the gap was between a major organization and its customers. The company, one of the world's largest players in the food industry, had been suffering falling share prices. The crisis was well known. You could read about it in any publication that reported on the industry. The company understood that listening to the consumer would be a good idea.

After nearly three weeks in the field — talking, living, cooking, eating, and partying with the company’s past, current, and future customers — I cooked up (so to speak) a top-10 list of questions that would explore the world according to the customer.

1. When it comes to food, what is your customer’s #1 concern?
2. Among the following four words — *organic*, *vegan*, *natural*, *tasty* — which two do customers hate and which two do customers love?
3. What is the #1 guilt factor preventing your customers from eating more of your product?

You get the point. I generated 10 straightforward questions. Anyone who truly knew the company’s customers should be able to answer every question in a heartbeat (just as I’m sure you could answer similar questions about your industry’s customers — right?).

The result? This company’s leaders answered one out of 10 questions correctly. Statistically, this is nearly impossible — even for an outsider, let alone a person who lives and breathes the industry.

When I showed them the results, they got it. *We don’t really know our customers any more.* The room was packed with white, middle-aged men (nothing against them, I’m one of them). Of

course they saw the world from their own point-of-view. Yet the majority of their future customers would be women, in their twenties and often multi-racial.

||

It is all about change

*“Be the change that you wish to see in the world.”*

*Mahatma Gandhi*

# 7

## In times of need, you can really make a difference

“Act your way into new ways of thinking rather than think your way into a new way of acting.”

Richard Pascal

### **It may sound odd, but now is the moment to build your brand**

Some 50 years ago, during the financial crisis of the '70s, my dad's best friend ran out of money, jeopardizing the future of his company and staff. Over dinner, he explained the situation to his bank manager. In less than two hours, the bank manager had made a decision, way outside his mandate, saving the business and its employees. What no one could know at the time was that the company would become one of Europe's largest pharma companies, with close to 50,000 staff. They still use the same bank.

Yesterday I called Qantas, the national airline of Australia, to rebook a flight, only to be told that they didn't want to rebook or cancel any flights during these coronavirus times. The person on the phone told me "We're busy" and hung up on me.

Qatar Airways, the national airline of Qatar in the Middle East, is charging you \$50 upfront for every call you make to them. It doesn't matter what your inquiry may be.

Then, of course, there are those airlines that have unplugged entirely. No answers, no response. Sure, they're in a crisis — but so is the rest of the world. I guess there are different ways of handling it.

What strikes me is that most airlines, car rental companies, hotels, supermarkets, insurance companies — you name it — behave like they never plan to interact with customers again. It's as if this is the end of the world. They may know something I don't, but I hold another opinion.

Recently, while conducting a workshop to design the ultimate customer journey, I asked the participants to remember the most amazing customer experience they'd ever had. They bombarded me with one story after another. One related the story of a family getting sick hours after they checked into a hotel — yet, thank God, one of the hotel staff went the extra mile and arranged for healthcare, food, and clean sheets around the clock. Then there was the lady who lost her passport in a nightclub, preventing her from leaving the country; she told a taxi driver the story; he listened carefully, found the club, retrieved the passport, and returned it to her.

In every one of these many stories, someone went the extra mile, often outside their area of authority, in order to help someone in need. What was most striking to me was that the participants' recollections were strikingly detailed, even though most of these stories had happened more than a decade ago.

Guess what? Right now there are a lot of people in need. Old people struggle to shop without having to leave their home and expose themselves to the virus. Waiters, bartenders, and airline crews have lost their jobs, with no new jobs in sight. Kids' schools have closed, though mom and dad are still expected at the office. Nurses are working day and night. The list goes on and on, adding up to hundreds of millions of people affected by the crisis. All are in need.

Some companies have stepped up to the challenge. Notably, banks in Europe and Asia are allowing their customers to postpone mortgages and payments on business loans for 3+3 months[1]. LinkedIn is offering free eLearning programs for people stuck at home[2], LVMH has converted two of their cosmetics factories into hand-sanitizer plants[3], and Armani is cranking out personal protection equipment[4].

Sadly, these are the exceptions. Many companies have taken steps to care for their employees, but few have done anything for their customers.

Where are those companies who claim "Like a good neighbor, State Farm is there," "You're in good hands" (Allstate) and "We'll leave a light on for you" (Motel 6). And the list goes on....

One thing I've learned is this: In times of need, you can really make a difference — and your customers will notice. In difficult times, you can cement a lifelong relationship. You can build your brand.

Well, guess what. That's now.

Forget about CRM systems, complex bonus point programs, and Big Data customer analysis. Right now you have the opportunity to make a lifelong impact on your customers — good or bad.

Sure, it'll cost money, and it may require some guts. Yet the rule of thumb is that it costs 10 times more to acquire a new customer than to keep one. So, while everyone is struggling, you should care. In this time of need, what's your plan to keep your customer? How will you solidify a lifelong relationship? Your effort now actually might be worth it for you and for them.

Which leads me to the post-coronavirus world. Whereas, pre-coronavirus, we heard about change, read about it, even tweaked our package design, launched a new app, updated the technology in our call-center, or installed the latest SAP system (oh, my) — we actually never really changed. From my point-of-view, that was all veneer. Change needs to go deeper, and COVID-19, our generation's Negative Somatic Marker, is probably the best reason to change you'll ever witness.

When the economy does recover, we're going to find ourselves in an entirely new online environment, with an entire generation expecting to interact via screens. Just because businesses have slowed down doesn't mean that new brands can't be launched.

Among the companies that started up during economic slow-downs are Heinz, Microsoft, Burger King, IHOP, FedEx, and Trader Joe's.

Countless businesses are already transforming themselves. Overnight, the government of Australia ordered all restaurants, bars, and cafes to shut down for three months. In Sydney, Australia, Paula Toppi and her husband called around to their network of suppliers and almost instantly converted Bar/M, their Italian restaurant, into a large Italian supermarket.

But they didn't stop here. Having their brand purpose in mind, they realized that they were really in the business of selling experiences and moments, not just food and beverage. So, they introduced a take-away cocktail menu, featuring uplifting names like "Instant happiness" and "Keep your distance – this is mine." They supplied hope to the neighborhood.

Next in line was a rollout of "do it yourself" cocktails bundled with a complete mini-bartender equipment set. They followed this with yet another invention: a day-by-day menu of specials, helping the isolated with new daily inspirations.

Six weeks into the lockdown, 20 of their staff were still employed full-time in this completely new business model. The alternative would have been zero staff — but perhaps more importantly, as Toppi revealed to me as I connected with her between the grocery shopping guests frequenting her newly converted restaurant-to-supermarket, all this had sparked a thought. "When this nightmare is over, I think we'll transform into a completely new business model. I don't think our guests

will ever dine the same way. Fear of contact, contamination, and coronavirus will mean they'll be looking for something else. Perhaps we'll offer a hybrid of our old restaurant and our new supermarket.”

So be on alert, World. There will be a big boom of new business models, new companies, and innovative brands in the next year or so.

### **Tomorrow...**

I don't think our fear and anxiety over spending is going to go away any time soon. I predict that until the economy recovers, we'll continue to be frugal by buying things more cheaply, choosing “pandemic brand” and supermarket-label products, and taking advantage of massive discounting. However, I also predict that the Negative Somatic Marker will play a role no other past recession in living memory has had. Blame our amygdala: We'll fundamentally change our routines.

Supermarkets that introduced washing machines for shopping carts and self-cleansing touch screens at the automatic check-outs will hold an advantage forever.

Airlines that removed every second seat in Economy class and installed self-cleaning lavatories will leap ahead of the rest.

Cinemas that installed screens between the seats, hotels (like Marriott) that disinfect the entire guest room as a standard, and clothing stores that tag the clothing tried by other customers for disinfection before the next customer enters the dressing room will all be first in line.

Then, as the economy recovers, the pendulum will begin to swing back — but not all the way back to the levels of spending that once defined us.

Now that we've gotten used to our “pandemic brands” (brands that cater to consumers who can no longer afford high-priced items), we've come to realize that these cheaper brands are often just as good as their pricier counterparts.

As a result, creatures of habit that we are, we'll be inclined to stick with them even once the economy picks up. Sure, some will rush back into the Hermes, Louis Vuitton, and Gucci stores, as many did in China. But realistically, the more expensive, branded items won't witness a boom for some time. Instead, we'll change our focus to new categories, new industries, and new inventions, all making us and our amygdalas feel safer.

We'll revisit our bucket lists and ask ourselves “What do I want to achieve with my life,” while rediscovering our sense of purpose and beginning a search for new options.

In fact, when the pandemic ends and the stock and oil markets begin to rise, my guess is that consumers will become even more hesitant and insecure about day-to-day spending than we are today (if that's possible). *Is this the right product? Should I buy this or that?* And instead, they'll save up for bigger-priced ticket items, helping to make better sense of why we exist.

I believe that, just as the Great Depression of the 1930s did for those who lived through it, this pandemic is going to cure us of our chronic overspending for a very long time.

At last we'll understand why our parents and grandparents behaved the way they did, because we now have a Negative Somatic Marker of our own. We now know they weren't miserly or crazy, just scared of what could happen if they let their spending get out of control.

So call your mother. Call your father. Call your grandparents, if they're still around. Tell them that even though you might have looked puzzled when they re-used that wrapping paper for the 20th time, now you get it. Perhaps you'll begin doing the same thing. It turns out it made sense all along.

## 8

### Your once-in-a-lifetime opportunity.

*“How wonderful it is that nobody needs to wait a single moment before starting to improve the world.”*

Anne Frank

It feels like a century ago, when I suggested to a senior executive at LEGO that they might need to fundamentally reconsider their business model. I said: “If plastic were banned and not a single LEGO brick could ever be produced again, what would LEGO do?” This forced management to think beyond the physical toy and enter the digital world.

Over the past several decades, LEGO had enjoyed immense success. However, from one year to the next, online games had disrupted the conventional toy market. LEGO had been left in its most vulnerable situation ever.

In hindsight, the situation was not only severe, but also pretty clear — but LEGO’s management “couldn’t see the forest for the trees.” This was the mid-90s, and they knew full-well that

plastic wasn't about to be banned, everyone loved LEGO, they were still earning money, and their employees' families were being fed. All things considered, things weren't that bad — at least, not bad enough to question a business model that was still doing great.

Let's jump ahead a quarter-century. Recently, I spent some time with the owner of Brand Innovators. They are a highly successful U.S. conference-organizing company. They'd spent nearly seven years developing a subscription model, designed to connect brand owners with industry experts.

Let me pause for a second. Did you notice that I didn't use a past-tense sentence as I wrote "They are a highly successful company"?

Over the past couple months, the rest of their industry has gone under. In contrast, Brand Innovators has pursued an alternative path that has kept them thriving. As Brand Innovators' co-founder, Marc B. Sternberg, told me: "South by Southwest collapsed in front of my eyes, leaving us with 36 speakers and no stage. I was kind of paralyzed, with no idea of what to do until my millennial team took over the helm of my company. Normally, I would have controlled every single aspect of my company, but I'd reached a point where I'd given up and just let them run with the ball. This was unheard of, but it re-defined our destiny."

In just two weeks, the entire company transformed to an online model, redefined the concept of subscription, and unexpectedly experienced a tidal wave of quality speakers knocking on their

door from all around the world. “The millennials redefined our company,” said Sternberg. “I didn’t.”

Today, despite the global crisis, Brand Innovators is as successful as ever.

While helping companies transform their businesses, I’ve learned this essential insight: The importance of creating a sense of urgency and forcing companies out of their comfort zones.

I call it a “90-day intervention.” By this I mean: Question your business model, totally redesign it, and try something truly creative for 90 days. Those of my clients who genuinely buy into this sense of urgency consistently end up with a remarkable success. In contrast, those who sit on the fence, question the approach, doubt the new solutions, and second-guess our crazy ideas ... for some reason, they end up with a mediocre outcome.

Ask any anthropologist, and they will tell you the reason why the human species has thrived, coming to dominate every other creature on planet Earth, is because of our ability to adapt. We aren’t the strongest or the fastest, we don’t have big fangs and claws — but our adaptability is so profound that we not only change our behavior from one generation to the next, but we even change our DNA. Compare that with polar bears, which will require ten or more generations to adapt to the consequences of global warming.

Change is in our blood, except when we get too comfortable. Unfortunately, that’s what we’ve (kind of) been during the past

decade. *Too comfortable.*

I fundamentally believe that nothing is so bad that we can't find some good in it. There's always an opportunity, a glimmer of light at the end of the tunnel.

What COVID-19 represents is exactly that. No silly workshop sessions or 90-day simulations are required here. This crisis is written on every wall, door, and panel. I don't think a single soul will deny it, so use it to your advantage. Give everyone in your organization, from the receptionist to top management, a simple-but-profound task: Rethink your business model. Ask the profound question, as I did some 25 years ago at LEGO. If we need to change everything from the ground up, what industry are we really in?

Believe me. Today, such a challenge is possible.

Listen to the dreamers in your organization, and if it all makes sense, hand them a mandate to make the change happen. Don't interfere. Don't stop them. Don't micromanage. Let them run with the idea, and I guarantee you'll be surprised.

You might end up with a new business model, as Brand Innovators did. Perhaps even better, as Marc B. Sternberg told me: "I'd suddenly re-energized my entire team. I gave them trust and a mandate like I'd never given before, and it worked. Suddenly, they were working day-and-night to show me and the world they were right. They'd seen the light. And suddenly, coincidentally, I'd redefined our culture to something powerful."

### **Covid-10 will define your legacy...**

“In the unlikely event of an emergency, please place the oxygen mask on yourself first before helping others.”

We’ve all heard this phrase countless times, as the airline staff announces the safety instructions over the loudspeakers.

Now, as the world economy prepares for an emergency landing, is this the guideline to follow? Where do we find ourselves, as leaders, managers, CEOs, and business owners?

Over the years, countless studies have demonstrated a direct link between kindness and health. When I summarized the essence of seven studies conducted over the past two decades, I discovered a highly thought-provoking conclusion: There is a linear correlation between the motivation of the nurses and other healthcare workers in hospitals and the recovery rate of their patients. In fact, the mortality rate drops ten percent as the healthcare staff’s motivation increases.

At the D-Day landing on 6<sup>th</sup> June 1944, the two commanders — British Field Marshal Bernard Montgomery and American General Dwight Eisenhower — approached the attack in completely different ways. Montgomery gave a radio speech focused on defeating the enemy. In contrast, Eisenhower was famous for having personal, face-to-face contact with his soldiers whenever he could. As he sent two million soldiers into combat on D-Day, face-to-face contact wasn’t possible; but his Orders of the Day were typically personal: “The hope and prayers of liberty-loving people everywhere march with you.... I have full confidence in your courage, devotion to duty, and skill in battle.”

In effect: “I know you, I’m in this with you, and I trust you to give it everything you have.”

That, in my opinion, was true leadership. It’s all about visibility and encouragement. It’s what this historical moment calls for. Remember: fear of change is the fear of the unknown. That’s something I’ve witnessed firsthand countless times, as we’ve worked to transform organizations around the world.

Recently, I asked one of the senior Maersk executives who, during their 2017 cyberattack, walked their offices daily, “What are you guys doing now, in this new crisis where no human contact is possible?” The answer was thought provoking. Walking the floors isn’t possible, but they indeed learned a lesson from 2017. They are conducting daily virtual lunches across the world. Encouraged by senior management staff to connect on a random basis, exchange thoughts and ideas, and share personal stories — while eating lunch “together,” each in their own homes — they are maintaining a remarkable culture without any physical contact.

We’re all under tremendous pressure, and the first thing we’re inclined to do is to study the financial situation, calculate our own D-Day, and put tremendous pressure on everyone to squeeze out everything we can to make ends meet. But what a lot of leaders may have forgotten is that their own fear and uncertainty are likely amplified through the ranks, ending up ten times worse at the bottom of the hierarchy.

With that in mind, it is clear to me that powerful, successful management in these times is all about placing yourself in

the shoes of your employees, trying to see the world from their point-of-view, and building a safe environment for them. As difficult as it sounds, for a few moments try to set aside your losses, cash-flows, order cancellations, and production challenges. Instead, spend some time nurturing your most important asset: your employees.

The impact will be remarkable, not just for your own corporate culture, but also (as the healthcare studies show) for your customers, too.

Here's the truth. What's happening right now is a lot more than a story for our grandchildren and the next generations to come. This is the moment when you define your legacy as a leader. You won't be remembered for wins or losses, but for how you were there for your employees and customers.

Tom Peters, one of the greatest management consultants of all time, said on a recent call, "No tombstone has ever featured the amount of money earned by the person lying underneath." Sure, money counts, but in the grander scheme of things, given the situation the world is in, there are more important things to save. As Maya Angelou once said: "People may not remember exactly what you did or what you said, but people will never forget how you made them feel."

## Afterword

One thing is for sure — change is constant. I hope to see you online where I daily share my thoughts on...

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*Sign up for my newsletter and learn more about culture transformation and innovation at...*

**Website:** [MartinLindstrom.com](https://www.MartinLindstrom.com)

# Footnotes

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## About the Author

Martin Lindstrom is the founder and chairman of Lindstrom Company, the world's leading business, brand & culture transformation group, operating across five continents and more than 30 countries.

TIME Magazine has named Lindstrom one of the “World’s 100 Most Influential People.” And for five years running, Thinkers50, the world’s premier ranking resource of business icons, has selected Lindstrom to be among the world’s top 50 business thinkers.

Lindstrom is a high profile speaker and author of seven *New York Times* best-selling books, translated into 60 languages. His book *Brand Sense* was critically acclaimed by *The Wall Street Journal* as “one of the five best marketing books ever published,” *Small Data* was praised as “revolutionary” and TIME Magazine wrote this about *Buyology*: “a breakthrough in branding.”

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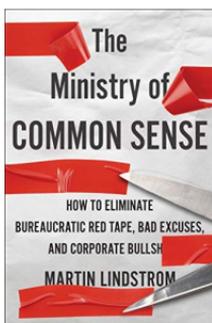
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## Also by Martin Lindstrom

Martin Lindstrom is a high profile speaker and author of 7 New York Times best-selling books, translated into 60 languages. His book Brand Sense was critically acclaimed by The Wall Street Journal as “one of the five best marketing books ever published”, Small Data was praised as “revolutionary” and TIME Magazine wrote this about Buyology: “a breakthrough in branding”.

Visit: <https://www.martinlindstrom.com/books-by-martin-lindstrom/> for more on Lindstrom’s books.

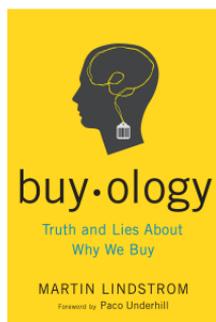


**OUT 19 JANUARY 2021**

A humorous yet practical five-step guide to ridding ourselves—and our companies—of the bureaucratic bottlenecks and red tape that plague every office. You try to reserve a conference room for a crucial client meeting via your company's new-and-improved computer service, only to find that every conference room is booked—seemingly forever. Your weekly conference call is hijacked by video screens freezing, cords not working, and employees dropping in and out. You then sit through an endless Power Point presentation that everyone claims they've read, no one has, and that could have been summarized in one page.

What has happened to common sense? And how can we get it back? Companies, it seems, have become so entangled in their own internal issues, and further beset by reams of invisible red tape, that they've lost sight of their core purpose. Inevitably, they pay the price.

Best-selling author Martin Lindstrom combines numerous real-life examples of corporate common sense gone wrong with his own ingenious plan for restoring logic—and sanity—to the companies and people that need it most. A must-read for today's executives, managers, and office workers, *The Ministry of Common Sense* is funny, entertaining, and immensely practical.



## **Buyology. Truth and Lies About Why We Buy**

Based on the single largest neuromarketing study ever conducted, *Buyology* reveals surprising truths about what attracts our attention and captures our dollars. Among the long-held assumptions and myths *Buyology* confronts:

Sex doesn't sell. People in skimpy clothing and provocative poses don't persuade us to buy products.

Despite government bans, subliminal advertising is ubiquitous — from bars to supermarkets to highway billboards.

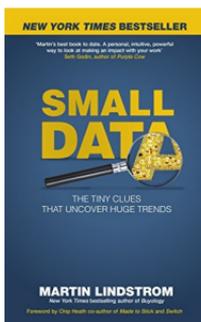
Color can be so iconic that the sight of the robin's egg blue of a certain famous jewelry brand significantly raises women's heart rates.

Companies shamelessly borrow from religion and ritual — like the ritual, made up by a bored American bartender, of drinking a Corona with a lime — to seduce our interest.

*“Cool” brands, like iPods, trigger our mating instincts.*

The fact is, so much of what we thought we knew about why we buy is wrong. Drawing on a three-year, 7-million dollar, cutting-edge brain scan study of over 2000 people from around the world, marketing guru Martin Lindstrom's revelations will captivate anyone who's been seduced — or turned off — by marketers' relentless efforts to win our loyalty, our money and our minds.

Packed with entertaining stories about how we respond to such well-known products and companies as Marlboro, Calvin Klein, Ford, and American Idol, *Buyology* is a fascinating tour into the mind of today's consumer.



## Small Data — The Tiny Clues That Uncover Huge Trends

The *New York Times* bestseller named one of the “Most Important Books of 2016” by Inc., and a Forbes 2016 “Must Read Business Book.”

“If you love ‘Bones’ and ‘CSI’, this book is your kind of candy.” – Paco Underhill, author

of *Why We Buy*.

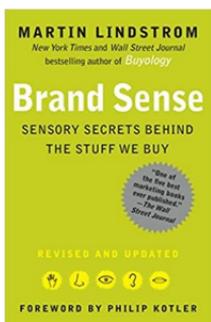
“Martin’s best book to date. A personal, intuitive, powerful way to look at making an impact with your work.” – Seth Godin, author of *Purple Cow*

Martin Lindstrom, one of *Time Magazine’s* **100 Most Influential People in The World** and a modern-day Sherlock Holmes, harnesses the power of “small data” in his quest to discover the next big thing.

In an era where many believe Big Data has rendered human perception and observation “old-school” or passé, Martin Lindstrom shows that mining and matching technological data with up-close psychological insight creates the ultimate snapshot of who we really are and what we really want. He works like a modern-day Sherlock Holmes, accumulating small clues — the progressively weaker handshakes of Millennials, a notable global decrease in the use of facial powder, a change in how younger consumers approach eating ice cream cones — to help solve a stunningly diverse array of challenges. In Switzerland, a stuffed teddy bear in a teenage girl’s bedroom helped revolutionize

1,000 stores, spread across 20 countries, for one of Europe's largest fashion retailers. In Dubai, a distinctive bracelet strung with pearls helped Jenny Craig offset its declining membership in the United States and increase loyalty by 159% in only one year. In China, the look of a car dashboard led to the design of the iRobot, or Roomba, floor cleaner — a great success story.

*Small Data* combines armchair travel with forensic psychology in an interlocking series of international clue-gathering detective stories. It shows Lindstrom using his proprietary CLUES Framework — where big data is merely one part of the overall puzzle — to get radically close to consumers and come up with the counter-intuitive insights that have in some cases helped transform entire industries. *Small Data* presents a rare behind-the-scenes look at what it takes to create global brands, and reveals surprising and counter-intuitive truths about what connects us all as humans.



## Brand Sense — Sensory Secrets Behind The Stuff We Buy

In perhaps the most creative and authoritative book on sensory branding ever written, international business legend Martin Lindstrom reveals what the world's most successful branding companies do differently — integrating touch, taste, smell, sight, and sound — with startling and measurable results.

Based on the largest study ever conducted on how our five senses affect the creation of brands, *Brand Sense* explains Martin Lindstrom's innovative six-step program for bringing brand building into the twenty-first century. The study, covering over a dozen countries worldwide, was conducted exclusively for this book by Millward Brown, one of the largest business research institutions in the world. Drawing on countless examples of both product creation and retail experience, Lindstrom shows how to establish a marketing approach that appeals to all the senses, not simply the conventional reliance on sight and sound. Research shows that a full 75 percent of our emotions are in fact generated by what we smell, and the author explains how to capitalize on that insight.

Included are innovative tools for evaluating a brand's place on the sensory scale, analyzing its future sensory potential, and enhancing its appeal to reach the broadest base of consumers. Lindstrom lists the top twenty brands for the future based on their sensory awareness. (The top three? Singapore Airlines, Apple, and Disney.)

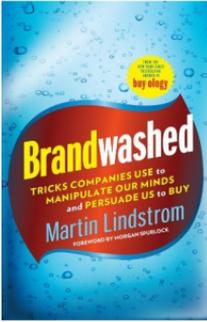
Among the book's many fascinating factual highlights are the following:

That gratifying new-car smell that accompanies the purchase of a new car is actually a factory-installed aerosol containing "new-car" aroma.

Kellogg's trademarked crunchy sound and feel of eating corn-flakes was created in sound labs and patented in the same way that the company owns its recipe and logo.

Singapore Airlines has patented a scent that is part of every female flight attendant's perfume, as well as blended into the hot towels served before takeoff, and which generally permeates their entire fleet of airplanes.

Starbucks' sensory uniqueness is far less strongly associated with the smell and taste of coffee than with the interior design of its cafés and its green and white logo.



## **Brandwashed**

A shocking insider's look at how global giants conspire to obscure the truth and manipulate our minds.

Marketing visionary Martin Lindstrom has been on the front lines of the branding wars for over 20

years. Here, he turns the spotlight on his own industry, drawing on all he has witnessed behind closed doors, exposing for the first time the full extent of the psychological tricks and traps that companies devise to win our hard-earned dollars.

Picking up from where Vance Packard's bestselling classic, *The Hidden Persuaders*, left off more than half-a-century ago, Lindstrom reveals: New findings that reveal how advertisers and marketers intentionally target children at an alarmingly young age — starting when they are still in the womb! Shocking results of an fMRI study which uncovered what heterosexual men really think about when they see sexually provocative advertising (hint: it isn't their girlfriends). How marketers and retailers stoke the flames of public panic and capitalize on paranoia over global contagions, extreme weather events, and food contamination scares. The first ever neuroscientific evidence proving how addicted we all are to our iPhones and our Blackberrys (and the shocking reality of cell phone addiction — it can be harder to shake than addictions to drugs and alcohol). How companies of all stripes are secretly mining our digital footprints to uncover some of the most intimate details of our private lives, then using that information to target us with ads and offers “perfectly tailored” to our psychological profiles.

How certain companies, like the maker of one popular lip balm, purposely adjust their formulas in order to make their products chemically addictive.

What a three-month-long guerrilla marketing experiment, conducted specifically for this book, tells us about the most powerful hidden persuader of them all. And much, much more. This searing expose introduces a new class of tricks, techniques, and seductions — the *Hidden Persuaders* of the 21st century — and shows why they are more insidious and pervasive than ever.

*“Martin Lindstrom shatters conventional wisdom.”*

- CNBC



Based on more than 2,000 brainscans of subjects in six countries, *Buyology* was the first book ever to apply neuroscience to the world of business.

Now, 12 years after *Buyology*'s publication, Martin Lindstrom releases an exclusive pocketbook, *Buyology for a Coronavirus World*, on the human impact of coronavirus. With fascinating insights from his neuroscience work, he explores how businesses should navigate the opportunities and pitfalls of this newly transformed landscape.

- *Learn how a leading car brand's unusual consumer insight generated double-digit sales during 2008's financial crisis.*
- *Discover which categories and brands are likely to thrive like never before in the upcoming post-pandemic world.*
- *Understand why lack of touch during isolation, more than any other factor, is likely to change consumer behavior.*

Martin Lindstrom takes the reader on a fascinating ride, combining science with business. His visionary mindset helps you prepare for our post-pandemic world.