

A Business Lesson from Follow the Other Hand: A Remarkable Fable that will Energize Your Business, Profits, and Life

The book "Follow Your Other Hand" cleverly uses magic to explain how a business can use strategy and innovation to shake up tired assumptions and practices.

By Andy Cohen
Author, Follow the Other Hand

Cohen's book takes its title from one of a series of business lessons that are taught using magic as metaphor. The first lesson is to empower companies to challenge their assumptions and those of their peers in order to look at their markets in a new and different way. Just as a magician wants you to focus on one hand, the true solution to the magic is found by "following the other hand." This principle translates into a real business application below.

Thinking Differently: Deciding Which Hand to Follow

1. Create an Effect: Deodorant manufacturers believed that a body spray would never succeed in the U.S. because the category simply didn't exist. But they were just looking at one hand. They failed to imagine what might be in the other hand and instead stuck to the conventional wisdom.

2. Follow the other hand: Unilever, the manufacturer of AXE, looked at the other hand and challenged this assumption. They challenged the view that the main reason people buy deodorants is to avoid sweat and smell. AXE accepted that (a) the fact that no one had done a body spray in the U.S. did not mean it was impossible and that (b) guys don't care how they smell when with other guys, but with girls it's a different story. So, (c), Unilever decided to position the body sprays to guys 18-24 as a way of helping them "get the girl."

3. Develop the method: Try thinking what the process would be if you followed the new solutions or ideas. What could you accomplish if you chose to ignore those voices that said, "it can't be done?" and instead thought, "What if it could be done?"

4. Begin with a great performance: AXE tested provocative banner advertising such as showing cheerleaders running after football players trying to pull their pants down. One million visitors clicked on the ad, visited the site and stayed—on average—more than 5 minutes. This was a month before the product was even in the stores. Unilever also placed AXE where the boys shopped in the store: the electronic, music, and auto departments of Wal-Mart and other retail distributors.

5. Achieving the effect: Following the other hand generates new ideas and offers great success, and the rewards go to those who perform first. AXE was one of the most successful product launches in early 2000. The product line was expanded to more than 16 similar body sprays from "Apollo" to "Voodoo." Within two years. Old Spice and Tag introduced their own body sprays, closely mimicking AXE's original positioning. AXE was the first to challenge the assumption and the others have been playing catch-up even since.

