

# TOM

## Saved by Irrelevance

# ASACKER

“Existence is no more than the precarious attainment of relevance in an intensely mobile flux of past, present, and future.” — *Susan Sontag*

Last Friday night, at the end of a very long week dealing with my intensely mobile flux, I loaded up my briefcase, hopped into my car and began my familiar trek home. I had no sooner pulled out of my office parking lot than the “Happy Now” voice in my head started popping off: “C’mon, Tom. Let’s not go home yet. Let’s go unwind a bit.” Not being in the mood for an argument, I acquiesced and headed over to my favorite terrestrial, social networking site (or “pub” for you more plain-spoken readers).

It was a clear, temperate New England evening (finally) and I had no sooner found a parking space and fed the meter than Mr. “Happy Life” decided to chime in: “Dude, what are you doing? It’s getting late and you’ve got to get up early tomorrow morning. You’re going to drop ten bucks? For what? A couple of beers? A few laughs? Some extra calories? This is stupid.” Not being in the mood for an argument (are you sensing a pattern), I tuned him out, locked the car doors and headed for the tavern.

As I approached the front door, I noticed an unusually large number of people milling about. And when I walked in, my suspicion was confirmed; the place was packed. “There must be an event of some sort this evening,” said Happy Now, as I wiggled my way through the crowd. “See, I told you this was a mistake,” Happy Life sighed. “Don’t listen to him!” said Happy Now. “He only cares about himself. Let’s take a walk around and look for a familiar face.” Again not wanting to squabble, I maneuvered the three of us through the good-humored throng.

After about ten minutes of dealing with the sustained din of the crowd, along with the vexatious voices in my head, it hit me! Having never encountered a waitress nor seen a friendly face, I was unexpectedly off the proverbial hook. I had just been saved . . . by irrelevance! There was absolutely no reason to be there, so I didn’t have to waste any more energy dealing with my invisible friends. I could walk out the door and head home with the voices in my head mercifully silent, at least for a while. In my mind, at that particular flux in time, that pub, and any decision about it, simply ceased to exist.

During my drive home I mulled over my revelation and became aware of this fairly obvious, yet often overlooked, marketplace reality: Each and every day, we are all saved by irrelevance a countless number of times. Thankfully. We’d never get to work, get work done, or get out of the grocery store, if our attention was constantly being engaged by the appeal of relevant products, services, ideas, causes, and people. In fact, we should really be grateful

to those people and organizations responsible for the lion's share of stuff that, in our minds, simply does not exist. Here are just a few examples Happy Now, Happy Life, and I were conscious of over the past few days:

“Lookie here! Free coffee. Good thing they're not relevant at their regular prices or we'd have to change our route to work. Yea, good thing. Saved.”

“Hmmm . . . a voice mail message: *'Please call. Here's our number.'* That's it! Yup. Delete it. Okay. Saved.”

“What's this? Another email requesting our participation in something or other. And why, precisely? What's in it for us? No idea. Report it as spam. Done. Saved again.”

“A bill. Another bill. Another bill. And look . . . another letter looking for money. Toss it into the circular file. Nice shot! Two points. Saved.”

“Well, whatdayaknow? They changed the name of Boston Garden to TD Bank North Garden. I thought it was the FleetCenter. Gee, I though it was the Shawmut Center? Whatever? Who cares? Saved.”

“Well, I'll be! Another radio ad for a car dealership. What a surprise. Not. Hit the scan button. Saved.”

“Wow! A new flavor of toothpaste. And look at this, razors with yet *another* blade. Keep movin'. Okay. Saved.”

In total, the three of us only wasted a few minutes of our time on those particular stimuli. But can you imagine how much time we would have invested had the people who created them known what they were doing? And here's the unfortunate thing: Most may be well-intentioned people. In fact, they may have a noble purpose, decent products and competitive pricing. But most of *us* will never know. Because what those people don't have is an appreciation for, and understanding of, how to engage and appeal to their audience. They are either unwilling or unable to create something meaningful and valuable for both Happy Now and Happy Life.

You see, Happy Now desires novelty and engagement; pleasurable sights, sounds, tastes, conversations, and experiences. Happy Life? He's all about improving himself—mentally, physically, economically, socially, and spiritually. He's concerned with rituals and relationships, family and friends, learning new skills, growth, and giving back. Everyone plays this balancing of choices game—happy now vs. happy life—all the time, moment by moment. Our ultimate goal is to avoid the either-or paradox and satisfy the desires of both. And if you can help us do that by adding a balance of value to your communications and offerings, you'll attain relevance and . . . you'll exist! If not . . . well, thanks anyway. You saved us. Right guys?

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Tom Asacker writes, teaches, and speaks about radically new practices and ideas for success in chaotic times. He is an independent brand adviser and author of critically acclaimed books including *A Clear Eye for Branding* and *Sandbox Wisdom*, and his latest, *A Little Less Conversation*. Visit [www.aclareye.com](http://www.aclareye.com) to learn more.