

## No Leaf Unturned

By John Fanning



# SILENT SKILL

**JOHN FANNING ON A BOOK ABOUT INFLUENCE IN BUSINESS: WHAT IT MEANS AND WHY WHEN MASTERED IT PROMISES POWERFUL RESULTS**

The regular stream of new books on branding appears to have slowed down to a trickle and if the various titles supplied by the Dear Editor last year are anything to go by publishers are concentrating more on books aimed at increasing the effectiveness of individual executives rather than the companies by which they are employed; Brand You is replacing Brand X.

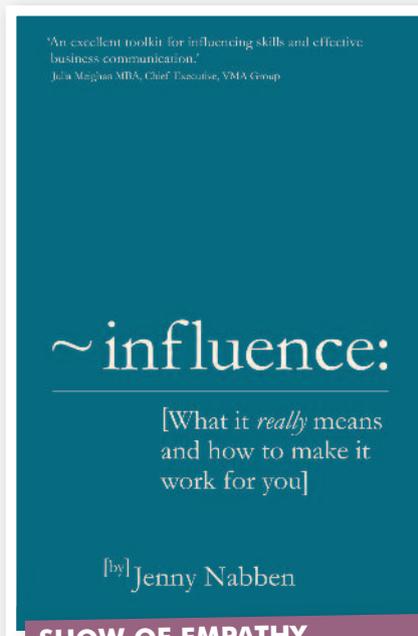
Regular readers of this column, assuming, of course, that there are any, will have probably already guessed that I'm not likely to welcome this development and they're right; I find it hard to stomach all that positive psychology and Californian codology. Once upon a time these self-help books were merely full of simplistic twaddle but in an effort to provide them with more intellectual heft they're now replete with the latest findings from neuroscience accompanied by grisly diagrams of the brain. I don't know about you, but my eyes glaze over at the mention of the amygdala, hypothalamus and the medial prefrontal cortex.

But, in an effort to strike a more positive note for the new year, I made a mighty effort trawling through the shallow depths of the genre and finally emerged with a tasty enough little morsel; *Influence: What it Really Means and How to Make it Work for You* (FT Press), by Jenny Nabben, who is a UK-based corporate communications consultant.

*Influence* is based on the fairly obvious premise that an ability to positively influence others is one of the most important skills for success in personal and business life. But the main reason why I believe it should be of interest to *Marketing.ie* readers is that some of Nabben's key lessons for enhancing influence are directly relevant to our business.

Early on in the book, Nabben describes an experiment with four groups of athletes. The first concentrated 100 per cent on physical training, the second did 75 per cent physical and 25 per cent mental preparation, the third had a 50:50 split and the fourth only 25 per cent physical and 75 per cent mental training. The final group performed best.

One lesson for us here is that in making a presentation we should probably devote more time to considering the state of mind of our intended audience; what's important to them,



### SHOW OF EMPATHY

While content is king, context is queen. Marketers need to pay attention to the other person's perspective and listen closely so that conversations can be framed for maximum effect.

what are their values, what motivates them, what they are afraid of and how do they feel about this issue. It may well be that most of us in marketing are so focused on getting the content right that we don't really take into consideration the mood and mind-set of our audience.

Seeing the world from our audience's perspective is critical to our ability to influence them. It also requires a high level of emotional intelligence and the author regards empathy as one of the most important attributes of a successful career. The art of listening is also critical to exerting influence.

We tend to do it on autopilot, but Nabben correctly points out that listening is a radical act in a world that prefers to talk; on average, we listen to each other for about eight seconds before we either interrupt or actively stop listening.

There is a big difference between listening and hearing; listening requires focused attention. The rewards of concentrated listening are twofold; first, we learn more and second, we earn greater respect. People intuitively understand when we are making the effort.

Words are another important element in our ability to influence others, but although we are very careful about the way we craft an ad we may not always pay enough attention to the words we use in conversations and presentations. We can prime people by our choice of words and there's an interesting example in the book where a group of people are given a text to read which contains plenty of words associated with older people, for example bingo and arthritis. Immediately afterwards, the group was observed to be walking more slowly. Nabben argues that the most powerful words are in stories. In every culture in the world people have sat around telling stories; they're in our nature and the more your presentations are peppered with relevant stories, the more you will engage your audience and win them over..

While content is king, we often forget that context is queen and we fail to pay enough attention to the other person's perspective. We don't listen closely enough and we often don't frame our conversations for maximum effect. This book is a timely corrective and a close reading should ensure a more happy and prosperous 2015, but here's wishing you the same anyway.

[john.fanning44@gmail.com](mailto:john.fanning44@gmail.com)

**John Fanning lectures on branding and marketing communications at the UCD**