



Is "How-NOT-To" More Powerful Than How To?

Three Month Vacation Podcast

Sean D'Souza:

This is the Three Month Vacation and I'm Sean D'Souza. Today I was at the café as usual. As I'm paying the bill, the guy, he knows I'm writing the book on pricing and he says, "Well, why is it taking you so long." I said, "Well, it's because I'm not just writing how to, but I'm writing how not to." He lifts his eyebrows like people often do when they don't really want to ask you a question but the question is on their mind, so I feel compelled to answer the question.

That's what we're going to cover in today's episode. We're going to see how how to is more an intellectual thing and how not to is more instructional, and why both of them combined make such a potent weapon when you're teaching something, and also when you're learning it.

I don't know if you've ever heard of the water test. Now the water test is a test that you do to figure out if the frying pan is at the right temperature. Often when we're cooking, what we'll do is we'll take a frying pan and we'll put some oil on it. Then the oil will start to heat up and then we'll put some chicken in it. The chicken or the fish, it sticks to the pan. Now that only happens because the pan is not at the right temperature or the oil is not at the right temperature.

I was watching this video online and they were showing me how to figure out the right temperature. What you have to do is you take a little water and you drop it on the pan. If it goes vsshhhhh, then the pan is not hot enough. Of course you go through many of these, until at one point it's magic. The water droplet just rolls in the pan as if it were a blob of mercury. At that precise moment you put the oil in the pan and then immediately after that the chicken or the fish, and it doesn't stick.

Here's what I did. I took the pan, I followed the instructions, and no matter how many times I tried to get that water test to work, and it just wouldn't work for me. I'm pretty persistent. I went at it quite a while and the pan was in danger of getting burnt, but I still wasn't having any success with it.



This doesn't make any sense, because when you think about it, I had the instructions. I should have been able to get it right but I wasn't getting it right.

In this episode we'll cover three things as always. The first thing is the importance of how not to vs. just how to. The second is why how not to works. The third is when to bring it in. What's the right time to bring it in? Let's start off with the first topic, which is how not to. What is it and why is it so important?

Let's go back to my frying pan. There I was with the frying pan trying to get the water test to work, but it wouldn't work. The reason why it wasn't working was because in the video they had a stainless steel frying pan and I had a non-stick. Now you might think that makes perfect sense. You're such an idiot. You should have seen it was a stainless steel one. They would have even mentioned take a stainless steel frying pan.

But when you're encountering something it's like learning a new language. You're just struggling at so many levels that it's easy to have this blind spot, to have many blind spots in fact. You're so focused on trying to get it right, not to goof up, that eventually you do goof up. That's because how to is an intellectual process. It might seem like how to are the steps. You're doing one step, the second step, the third step.

But if you've ever sat in an audience when a presenter is talking about, say, search engine optimization, or they're talking about pricing, or they're talking about something that you're not that familiar with, you get it. I remember the time I was at this water color class in Spain. The artist was showing us how to get these reflections of light on a rainy day. When he showed us he went through the steps. This is step one. This is step two. This is step three. I got it.

Then I went to my easel and I got the paint out, and then it all falls apart. Of course the reason why it falls apart is not because of the how to, the how to is already in place, but the how not to. That is the beauty of learning. Most of us are so focused on giving our clients how to. Whether we're consultants or we're teachers or we're training or writing books, we're so focused on giving them the how to that we don't realize that they go off-track on the how not to.



This takes us to the second part, which is why does the how not to work so well. Don't get me wrong, the how to works exceedingly well, but it works at an intellectual level. If you really want the client to practically use whatever you've showed them, then you've got to get to a how not to level.

Essentially what you're doing is you're highlighting the mistakes that people will make. Let's say you're drawing a cartoon and you place a character on one side of the page and another character on the other side of the page. What happens at that point in time? There is nothing wrong with the cartoon. You've drawn a great cartoon, because if you go and speak to 20 people they will say, "Wow, that looks really good," but from a composition point of view, that is terrible.

As a consultant you need to be able to tell your clients what to do and where they can go wrong. As a writer, you've got to do the same thing. You've got to tell them what to do, how to do something, and where it can go wrong. We have this responsibility with our clients to show them how things go wrong, and of course, the how to, which is how to get it right.

Which of course takes us to our third part, which is where do we bring in this factor of how not to. When a client starts reading an article or reading a book, or doing anything with you, they essentially want to hear how to do something. They don't want to know how not to do something. It just drives them crazy to have to listen to all the mistakes.

Once they figure out what steps they have to take, then at that point in time it's a very good idea to bring in the how not to. One of the really good ways of bringing in a how not to is to have an example. The example could be a story; it could be a case study; it could be something from history. Now the moment you bring in an example, two things happen.

The first is the attention spikes. The how to has been driving them crazy. Well, it's been driving their brain crazy, because the more you get in terms of information, the more your brain gets tired. The how not to takes the opposite stance, and the fact that you're using an example or a case study makes it even better. It makes it better because now you're taking the opposite stance. When you take an opposite stance you create contrast. When you create contrast you create attention.



The how to has its role. It creates attention, but as you go through the how to, the brain gets more and more tired because it has to juggle with all these facts. Then you get to the how not to, and again, you've got the audience's attention, but now you're doing it with a story. Shall we go to some stories and examples? We should, shouldn't we? Here is example number one.

I recently wrote a book on pricing. It's called Dartboard Pricing, and it shows you how to set your prices, how to do sequential pricing, how to increase your prices without losing customers. There right in the middle of the book is a table, and the table only has four elements. Now how much can you get wrong with four elements? Well, as it turns out, quite a lot. Over the years this table, called the yes and yes table, has helped people increase their prices by 10%, 15%. But they still get it wrong.

How do they get it wrong? I go through several pages of showing them the how not to, showing them all the tables that went wrong, and people just love this. They love to see how someone else got it wrong. They look at those case studies, the attention goes up, but the lesson goes home. Now they know how to because of the how not to.

You might think that this applies just to business but it applies to everything in life. For instance, I mentor my niece Marsha. We have to do spellings. Now sometimes Marsha will go off-tangent and no matter how much I try to get the spelling across she will still spell it incorrectly. What do you do? You go to the how not to stage. You show her how not to spell the word.

What I do is I make her spell the word as she's spelling it and say that's the wrong way to spell it. Then I give her the right way to spell it, at which point in time I tell her now spell it wrong. You know what happens to the brain? It's not able to cope with spelling something wrong. She has two options. She can spell it right or spell it wrong, but now that she knows how it's spelled wrong, her brain switches back to spelling it right. I tell her spell it wrong; she spells it right. I say spell it wrong; she spells it right. Wrong, still right.



This is the power of how not to. When you expose the concept of how not to, you get to people at a very practical level. When you give them how to, you go to them at an intellectual level. Both of them are needed. The intellectual stimulates, gets tiring. Go to how not to and then you can implement it.

At this point in time we run into an even bigger problem. When you have a how to, the steps are usually limited. If you have to put something together, you have maybe step number one to step number 17, but when we consider the realm of how not to, we're looking at an enormous number of things that people could do wrong. What are you supposed to do? The how not to exposes how much you're confusing your audience. The best advice I can give you on this is to get them step by step, to bring out the step, to take them through the how to, to take them through the how not to, and then move to the next step. You're tackling one thing at a time, and that's the way the audience really gets it.

The second thing that you have to consider is the medium. Now in a presentation, probably an hour-long presentation, you have more time to go into the how to and how not to. In a book you definitely have more time. You have more space. In an audio or a video you don't have that much space. You probably didn't realize it, but I just ran two how not to's by you. In audio or video you need to keep the how not to's short, a couple of them and then move along. In a book, in a presentation, you have a little more space, a little more leeway.

With that, we finish how to and how not to. Let's summarize. What are the three things that we covered? The first thing that we covered was the how to. We started off with the concept of how to and how not to, and that how to is an intellectual process and how not to is very powerful because it allows you to implement things. The second thing that we covered was how not to. How does it work? We saw how it gets the attention of the customer. It gets the attention of the reader simply because it shows you what you shouldn't be doing but it also is very useful for you as a creator of audio or video or a book or a consulting, because it spikes that attention just after all of those how to's have tired the person out. Now you've got this situation where you are creating attention yet again.



You do this with a case study. You do this with a story. You do this with an example. I gave you the example of the yes and yes in the pricing book and how people get it wrong, and also how I work with my niece Marsha, with her spellings. If you've got kids around, you should try this. Finally, we talked about where to use it. Usually the how not to comes right at the end. Just when all that attention is going down the gurgler, that's when you want to pick it up with the how not to.

What's the one thing that you could do today?

You want to start documenting the mistakes. You want to start documenting where people go off-tangent. Let's say I'm doing a course right now on article writing. What I do is I document where they go off-course. Then that becomes part of the documentation. The next time I give some kind of instruction on what to do this week, I also put in the how not to. That makes a huge difference. If you're writing an article, write the how to. Write a bit of how not to. You're writing a book? How to, how not to. Presentation? How to, how not to. Work out the how not to's. That's all you really have to do.

It's almost time for me to go for my coffee and to the beach, so that brings us to the end of this episode. Now I've been going on and on about the pricing book and Dartboard Pricing. Pricing affects us all. There's not a single one of us that really knows what is happening with pricing, so how do you get better prices? This book has some fascinating examples and pretty much a lot of how to, but one of the things that is very powerful in the book is book number three, which tackles sequential pricing, where instead of your prices going up all the time, they actually go up and then they go down.

Why would you want your prices to go down, and how do you create this strategy? That's what sequential pricing is all about. If you want excerpt of the book you can get it at psychotactics.com/prx. If you still want the book, it might still be on Trust The Chef. If you are lucky and you get to it before we raise the prices, get it. Go to psychotactics.com. Search for Trust The Chef and get your copy of Dartboard Pricing.



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