



Noah's Tuesday Tidbits

The Best of August 2017

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The Fleece of the Century

Listen to this week's audio version of the tidbit.

The NYT called Saturday night's boxing match *The Fleece of the Century*, and it's hard to argue against that. A lackluster boxing match with two entertainers showing us that it was all just a big ruse as they buddied up during the post-fight press conference.

McGregor couldn't keep the grin off his face as he said, "the cheques are a lot better in boxing," all the while promoting his upcoming whiskey brand. The two hugged and smiled as they showed their cards—millions had bought it hook, line, and sinker.

Reportedly, the boxers walked away with a combined \$300M bucks. Mayweather got \$200M and McGregor left with \$100M.

The view of the NYT article seemed to be the rule, not the exception. Everywhere I looked on Sunday morning the stories were the same. We were all fleeced, they said. Mayweather & McGregor pulled off the ultimate 9-figure con.

This kind of criticism reminds me a lot of pundits saying that Facebook was an overvalued flash in the pan in 2007 (Zuckerberg should have sold to MySpace for \$50M, he lost out on the deal of a lifetime). It is not only short sighted, but it also seems to miss the point so spectacularly that it makes you wonder whether they live in the same world as the rest of us.

Here's the flip-side of the NYT opinion:

Mayweather and McGregor earned every penny of their split \$300M before they ever stepped into the ring. They created a spectacle, they spent months doing the "world tour," and they created an experience unlike any other.

To think that McGregor and Mayweather were selling a boxing match is ridiculous.

To think that the vast majority of the people watching cared about which boxer was better is ridiculous.

They were selling entertainment, and millions of people bought it.

It's a lesson that both McGregor and Mayweather have learned in their respective sports—nobody cares how good they are at what they do, but everybody cares how entertained they are by the combatants.

The business lesson here should be obvious. It was a core component of my book *The Customer Loyalty Loop*, and something that I've talked about in these Tidbits before, but I really cannot stress this enough.

Simply put: You are not selling what most people think you are selling, and you won't be effective until you truly understand what your customers really want to buy.

For some of us, that improvement is measured in extra profit for our clients at the end of their year.

For others, it's measured in stress reduction, or increased confidence, or increased productivity.

The key question for all of us is this:

"What are our clients really buying from us?"

Once you know that, you can figure out how to package that regarding the product/service that they're paying for. You can build the experience to support the product/service that delivers the desired results. Nobody needs to get fleeced—you just give your customers what they really want.

Here's your challenge for this week:

In three sentences or less, describe what your customers are buying from you **WITHOUT** mentioning your products or services.

Feel free to **send me your response**.

A \$5M Bet That You Don't Need More Training

Whenever somebody asks me about sales training (or any training for that matter), I always challenge them with the “**\$5M Cash Test**,” first.

95 times out of 100, it becomes apparent that they don't need training, and they recognize exactly the areas that they need to work on.

So what is the **\$5M Cash Test**? Obviously, I'm not giving them \$5M (or even asking for it, in most cases...) :-)

The test is this: *Imagine you have a salesperson and you want them to close 100% more deals per month. Could they do it? More importantly, if you offered them \$5M cash to accomplish that in one month would they succeed? Or would they fail miserably?*

If you think they could, what would they be doing differently with that kind of money on the line?

If it's just a matter of making more calls, polishing their pitches, being more diligent with follow-up, or anticipating and handling objections, then they could probably do it, and then retire comfortably.

In other words—if they could do it for an extra \$5M, there is nothing stopping them from doing it today.

But what if they didn't know what you were selling, and are only closing the (few) deals per month they currently do through sheer luck and numbers.

If they legitimately don't know how to position your product in a way that's

appealing; if they legitimately don't understand how poorly they're presenting themselves to prospects and existing clients; if they don't know that you can't ask for the order before you demonstrate value; if they're doing the best they can and they're working 12 hours a day without slacking off right now.

If they don't know the mechanics, in other words—then there's no way that they're going to walk away with that sweet \$5M in cash.

Now, I want to be clear here—I'm not suggesting that the only options are "Train them or tell them to stop being lazy and perform." Instead, I want you to consider the fact that 95 times out of 100 when a company believes they need more training (in sales, service, marketing, whatever etc.) what they really need are better ways to support their staff.

Let's keep working with sales for the case of this tidbit.

Instead of the issue being that salespeople need more skills, it's often the case that they're being asked to do too much, with too little. They need better processes, better structure, better tools, and a better culture.

If your company hasn't addressed these issues first, then training is a waste of money. People may learn some fun new tactics, and there may be a temporary uptick in sales, but without addressing the root of the problem, there's no way to maintain higher sales numbers (Well, I suppose you could put \$5M on the table every month?)

The flip side of that is that when you create a better sales environment by ensuring you have the right tools are in place, and there is a consistent selling culture and set of expectations, then your people will often do wonderfully even with no training.

And, of course, any training that they do get will be so much more effective because you will be able to ensure that it aligns with your values, culture, tools, and processes.

Your challenge for the week should be pretty obvious.

Do the "\$5M Cash Test" or the equivalent for your business. Put some serious cash on the table and see if it's truly a training issue. This is obviously not limited to the sales department—you can ask this question of anybody whose performance you can measure objectively.

Don't Learn More. Do More.

One of the little discussed joys of teaching my kids how to do tremendously fun things like swimming, or riding a bike, is that I get to reuse lines that I hated when I was learning those skills. My favorite, by far, is a variation on this exchange:

"That was awesome, but remember to look straight at where you're going, not down at the ground!"

"I know, I know, you already told me that!"

"If you already knew it, then why weren't you doing it? Let's try it again."

While I disagree with some of the Sandler sales training methodologies, I like the title of their book *You Can't Teach a Kid to Ride a Bike at a Seminar*. My four-year-old daughter is adamant about learning to swim this summer. Every chance we've had she wants to get in the pool and practice with me. In no time at all, it's coming together. She's determined to learn by doing it.

Something that kids learn quickly is that it's easy to know something, and it's hard to do it. It's a lesson we seem to forget as we get older and settle into our professions, though. In my work with clients, I often find a tremendous disconnect between knowing what to do and getting it done on a regular basis.

People, departments, and organizations can get so involved in their day to day workings that they miss the obvious. Or they think, "That's too simple to be helpful." Or they think "Surely, we must have a good reason for NOT doing this blisteringly obvious thing, and I'm too busy to find out what it is right now..."

Over the past ten years, I've worked with small companies doing a few million in revenue to global, publicly-traded Fortune 500 businesses and every one of them had plenty of blatantly obvious, simple, of-course-you-already-knew-that, things that weren't getting done. There's a lot of learning going on, or the quest for something bright, shiny, new, or better, but they're often missing the fundamentals.

One of the fascinating parts of the *Checklist Manifesto* was when Dr. Gawande explained why surgical checklists were so effective. It wasn't because doctors were learning new techniques from the list. It wasn't because it was teaching them some "secret 18 steps to successful surgery" that they hadn't learned in med school. It was because it forced them to do everything that's required and to think about every piece that's required, in every surgery. It sounds simple and obvious, but the truth is that

when the pressure is on, it's easy to forget the simple stuff, and the simple stuff is where the greatest results come from.

We don't want you wasting your time looking for the latest "secret," which you can only learn from us, and which will leave you as lost after you learn it as you were before. Instead, we want you to be looking for the simple things that (for whatever reason), you're not doing.

This attitude and desire for something "new" is one of the most common features of human nature that I see in my clients (and in my younger self), regardless of their industry or size. Perhaps it's because we've been trained to be information junkies, or perhaps it's because we'd rather feel like our lack of success to this point is because we didn't know some magical secret, rather than because we neglected to do the obvious work. Whatever it is, it's everywhere!

Here's an example to make this more concrete:

One of the first things we do with every client is to determine a measurable activity that is critical to performance, and then start tracking that activity. Every customer service person in a large B2B organization says it's obvious how to provide excellent service, but when we follow what proactive efforts they're making, we often find they're not doing much of anything. They are busy, they're stressed, filling their days with work, but the activities that they told us were the absolute, bottom line, most important and most impactful aren't getting done nearly as much as they need to be.

I was once told by an executive of a major organization after delivering multiple pages of recommendations that, "*We're already doing everything you're telling us to do,*" when in fact they weren't doing any of it—at all—and certainly with no consistency or congruency across the company.

I sure hope they bring their water wings to the pool.

Your challenge for this week:

Think back over the last couple of weeks. Have you heard any ideas, or been given any suggestions, that you dismissed as being "basic" or "boring" or "old news," but that you still aren't doing? If so, take a closer look at them and see how you can put them to work in your company.

If you haven't, be on guard for it in yourself and the people you work with over the next week.

Attitude Is a Corporate Asset,
and Some People Need an
Adjustment!

Listen to the audio version of this week's Tuesday Tidbit. You can subscribe on iTunes [here](#).

My mentor **Alan Weiss** often tells the story of working with—and subsequently being fired by—W. Clement Stone who argued that a Positive Mental Attitude (PMA) was the key to all success. Alan was fired for telling Mr. Stone that he had a positive mental attitude because he had \$400M bucks in the bank!

I just returned from a client event where one of the speakers talked about the importance of every employee having a *“positive mental attitude”* as they went through their day-to-day duties. I could see a few people's eyes rolling around the room, and it's easy to understand why—a comment like this is almost as *“hippy-dippy, frou-frou”* of saying a PMA can bring you riches of more than hundreds of millions of dollars. W. Clement Stone would have fired me too!

As I thought about this, It reminded me of many client discussions I've had with CEOs and senior executives. The co-author of my next book, Shawn Veltman, has had many similar client discussions. The best ones would often say something like this, *“You know what bugs me? When someone shows up and tries to impress me by telling me everything that's wrong here.”* These CEOs often talk about consultants and others who try to open doors by telling them everything that's wrong with them or using blogs and social media shaming as a way to create consulting opportunities. But then they say something like, *“But what's valuable—and impressive—is when someone can look for opportunities instead of just looking for problems. Any dimwit can find a problem!”*

So perhaps those frou-frou statements mean something?

Attitude is a valuable, corporate asset that needs to be developed, harnessed. And in many cases, any sign of dissent needs to be dealt with swiftly.

In my line of work, I often find that the people who complain the most or are most hesitant to adopt new strategies are usually the ones performing the worst. On the flipside, it's almost always the top performers who look at something new or fresh and ask themselves how they can apply it to their work. They're top performers for a reason, I guess.

Let me give you a more accurate example. I often rant and rail about the importance of

process in sales, marketing, and just about every customer-facing aspect of the business. When we're working with an organization to help implement a sales process, we usually get buy in from everyone at face value, but behind closed doors we hear of people who say things like, *"That might be really good for the new guys, but I've been here for 30 years and I know what works. Nothing is going to help me improve. I've seen it all before."*

It's often the worst performers who bring the most negativity to the scene. But what's even worse is when the smart, intelligent, people who represent our greatest opportunity for growth spend their time and energy looking for problems or looking for why this or that won't work. It's like a corporate cancer that eats away at everyone's attitude. Even the good guys, can be tainted by a lousy attitude.

There are a few ways to combat this and develop an attitude as a valuable corporate asset. Look, there is nothing is going to turn around a lousy corporate culture instantly, but there are a few ways to start going on the offensive. Here are a few ideas.

Your Challenge For This Week:

Identify an area of your business (or life) where you've dismissed something or haven't given it the attention it deserves and revisit that—see if you can talk, convince, or move out of a gut reaction belief that it won't work, and find a reason that it would. You don't need to actually make a change—but see if you can convince yourself that the positive side will work.

As a leader: The next time you run into this with one of your people you can say something like, *"Okay, John. You've made it clear this isn't going to help us. But let's suppose your job is to convince me it will work. Give that a try. Do it now. How could it work?"*

As an employee: The next time you find yourself immediately dismissing something, change the narrative. Instead of allowing your mind to say, "This won't work," ask yourself "how can this work?" or "what if this works?"

As a human being: Do something you've dismissed without trying, or next time you resort to being negative about something, just change the story in your head and ask yourself, "How can I be less of a "Debbie Downer" here and more positive?"

As trite as it may sound, there is a lot of truth to the old observation that to get a

better answer, we need a better question. If you habitually ask "*Why will this fail?*", You will find some great answers! If you ask "*Why will this succeed?*" you will find some great answers on the other side. Neither is necessarily wrong, but one sure is a lot more useful than the other!

You're Not as Unique as You Think

Every Tidbit is now available in audio format from iTunes. Subscribe [HERE](#).

I was working with a client in St. Louis last week. They took the entire customer service team out for an excellent appreciation dinner. At that dinner, I told them my famous [1-ply toilet paper](#) story and then we all shared experiences of good, bad, or indifferent service experiences.

What we all could agree on was that you never know what you're going to get.

We've talked a lot about process creation around sales, marketing, and just about every other customer-facing area of the business. But one of the comments we've made before is that an area like customer service, for example, can get you deep into a rabbit hole if you're trying to script the best response for every single customer situation.

We all know that no two situations are ever the same. They're alike, but they're not the same. That's why, when we talk about the process it's important to remember that you should only be giving them the highest level of detail required.

Here's where most people get it so wrong, though—they think that just because no two situations are the same in the fine details, means that the situations aren't alike. It's [why surgeons fought](#) so hard against the idea that a checklist could have such a huge impact on their success rates. It's why salespeople hate to follow a sales process.

This reluctance would make sense if the situations faced were truly unique in all important facets. Luckily for us, that's not the case.

One of my favorite analogies for this is physics. We know that objects in free fall accelerate at 9.8 m/s squared in a vacuum. Of course, our planet isn't in a vacuum. Does that mean that we shouldn't use this rule of thumb to guess at the acceleration rate of objects? I mean—it might be 9.799999 in one case or 9.8000001 in another.

Obviously, in these unique situations, your silly 9.8 m/s squared rule don't apply, right?!?!?!?

For most of us, the truth is that *"close is good enough."* If our processes model reality relatively closely then the benefit we get from consistency is more important than the rare potential flash of brilliance that we may miss.

Let me put it another way—if I'm getting heart surgery, I want the surgeon following the damned checklist, regardless of whether he thinks he's above it. I want this because I know that I've got a 37% better chance of living when he follows the damned checklist. Yes, a 37% chance of not dying getting your wisdom teeth removed.

So, from the heady topics of physics & medicine, let's come back to sales & customer service scripting.

Here's the single most important rule that we can give you on this topic: Don't tell them exactly what words to use in the script, but instead say what you're trying to accomplish and what acceptable variations look like.

Obviously, if you have incredibly specific language, then the level of detail required will include specific language, but the general point here is that we want our processes to give our people as much latitude as possible.

Similarly, in the sales process, we won't tell them exactly what they have to write in follow-up emails, or exactly how to phrase the various terms of the deal, but we will insist that they send a follow-up email and that they send a deal sheet.

We insist that instead of instantly calling a prospect the moment a lead hits the corporate inbox that they spend five minutes of doing research. You've all had calls from sales guys who saw the lead and didn't bother to check that you were in a different time zone, or spend five minutes learning about you.

In our upcoming book, *Dealing with Difficult Customers*, we address this in detail.

The book's main thrust is that while there are often demanding and disagreeable customers, companies can create internal practices and policies that dramatically reduce both the number and intensity of negative customer experiences, ultimately ensuring the best experience possible for their customers.

Your Challenge For This Week:

Identify 5-7 of the most common difficult situations that you may face (from clients, bosses, stakeholders, suppliers, employees, etc.), and ensure that you have a few “best” responses to them.

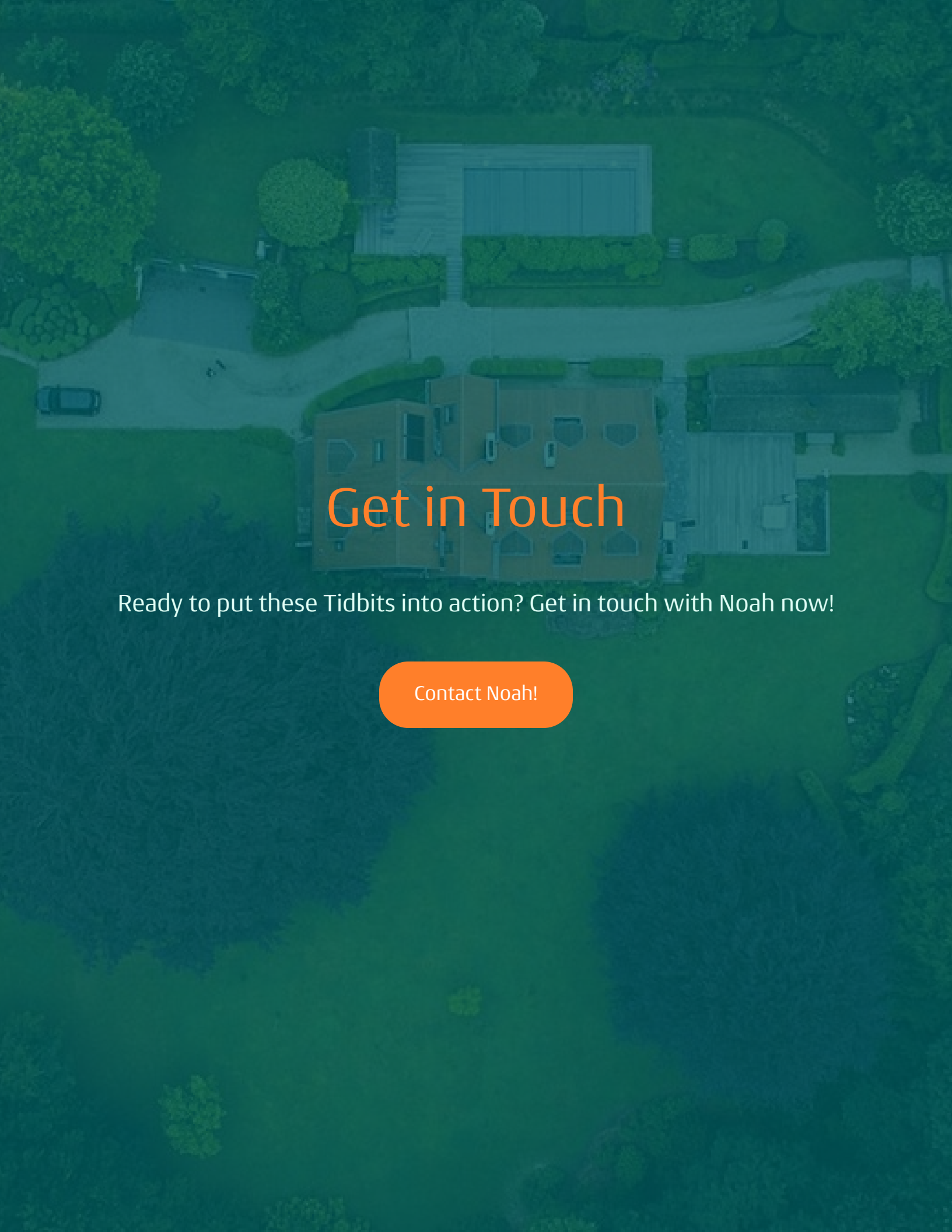
Here are a few examples...

Example from our practice: When somebody tells us that they don’t have the time to review a proposal, for example, we will always respond by pointing out that everybody has the same 1440 minutes in a day, so what they’re really saying is that it’s not a priority. Sometimes that’s true, and we go on our merry way - other times the prospect realizes that they got in touch because solving their problem is the biggest priority they have, and we’re back on track.

If you’re in sales: Identify the seven most common “objections” that you run into with your clients, and the best way to handle them.

If you’re in customer service, identify the 5-7 most common complaints that your customers have, and ensure that you have the “best” answers for them and ready to go.

If you’re in HR, know the five areas that are most important to the candidates that you want (i.e., an opportunity for advancement, remote work capability, equity vesting, and total compensation), and be sure to be able to present how your company handles these in the most favorable light.

An aerial photograph of a suburban property, featuring a large house with a brown roof, a two-car garage, and a driveway. The property is surrounded by lush green trees and landscaping. The image is overlaid with a semi-transparent green filter.

Get in Touch

Ready to put these Tidbits into action? Get in touch with Noah now!

Contact Noah!