

A templative tale from  
**Mischief Marketing**

## **Mischievous Bill Gates**

*[ excerpted from Chapter 9 (print edition) ... ]*

... In short, mischief marketing is about lightening up, enjoying life, and helping others to enjoy life, too.

Does that sound corny? Of course it does. But guess what? ALL THE GREAT TRUTHS IN LIFE ARE CORNY. The positive truths, anyhow, the life-affirming truths — they're all corny. Every last one of them.

Sure, there are negative truths in life, too. There are horrible truths about poverty and misery and war and death and disease and hypocrisy and evil. All these are the death-affirming truths. They're certainly not corny.

But the point is this: If you've got the fun, joyful, life-affirming truths before you, and you've got the depressing, sickening, death-affirming truths before you — choose the life-affirming ones. Don't reject them just because they're corny.

In a mischief marketing campaign, what you want to communicate to your prospects is that, somehow, by association with you or with your offering, their lives will be better and brighter.

### **Yes, the World's Richest Human Used to Pick Through Garbage**

Bill Gates and his friends turned the process of gathering information into an entertaining Salvation Army Mission Impossible.

*“Gates and his high-school friends pursued their intense interest in computers and programming to the extent of going through trash bins at a local computer company to find discarded programs. They retrieved papers from among the **garbage**, studied the*

*operating systems and eventually wrote a report on the company's computer problems. The company hired them. While still a high-school senior, Vancouver, Washington-based software firm TRW hired Gates as a programmer."*

— Newsmakers, 1993; Who's Who in Finance and Industry, 1996-97. Cited by CNN.com

Look, you want people to have fun, right? And the only way they can have fun is if *you* have fun. Having fun means living in the *process*, not in the result. **If you study Zen archery, the masters will teach you that hitting the target is NOT the primary goal.** The primary goal is to immerse yourself in the total physical, intellectual, and spiritual process that Zen Buddhism teaches — in this case through archery.

That's a hard concept for most of us to grasp, because we're so competitive. When we hear someone say, "It's not the destination, it's the journey" we have a tendency to go, "Yeah, right."

We think winning — hitting the target — is the most important thing. But it isn't. In fact, even if it were the most important thing, you would be more successful at "winning" if you stopped worrying about it and concentrated more on the process rather than on the result. When you concentrate on the process, you have fun. Conversely, when you're having fun, it shows that you're concentrating on (and enjoying) the process.

**In our culture, the most powerful model we have available to us — the mythological structure underpinning our lives — comes from the world of business.**

Where the ancient Greeks had Zeus and Apollo, we have Alan Greenspan and Bill Gates. And you should see what *they* look like wearing only a figleaf between them.

Now, you may *deplore* that fact about the modern devotion to money and business; you may *bitch* about it; you may wish it were something more obviously spiritual or soulful. **But whatever you may think, say, or do about it, the fact is that business has supplanted most other forms of human endeavor for most people in our time.** It is, whether we like it or not, what inspires people.

And when I say "business" I mean, of course, the business of entertainment and the business of sports, too. I mean every business. In every arena, the numinosity — the

sense of value, awe, and mystery — that used to be associated with religious ideas has moved to business. Even when they mention Mother Teresa, for example, what do you think most writers and critics talk about? They talk about what a great fucking *business* wizard she was. They talk about how many fucking *jets* she had. How much fucking *money* she raised. When they mention the Catholic or the Mormon church, they immediately mention assets and holdings. **These are the measures of our time.**

**But guess what? The golden calf is a great target for spiritual practice.**

You can make (out of the golden calf of business) a Zen target, a Christian target, a Jewish target, a Catholic target, a Mormon target, a New Age target. You name it. In short, **you can use business — the process of conducting business — to further your deepest spiritual development.** And why? Because what matters is not the target, but the process. Not winning, but how you play the game. Not the destination, but the journey.

A few people have pointed this out before, but **nowhere** is this so essential as it is in mischief marketing. If you're too grim and serious about making a lot of money (getting your hands on that golden calf), or about becoming a "success" in our culture, or about winning, or competing, or getting girls, or boys — mischief marketing won't work for you. You simply won't be able to do it well. Your campaigns will have a fishy quality about them. They will stink. You'll be like a student of Zen archery who thinks only about hitting the target. You may hit the mark, but you'll miss the point.

Not anyone can do mischief marketing. Sorry!

If you take yourself too seriously, then please: put your Wall Street suit back on, go to the bar, have another martini, and forget about it. Have you tried distributed accounting applications? That would be an exciting field for you.

The Mischief Marketing website talks about something called ***The Humor Project***. Please be sure to look into *The Humor Project* to find out about scientific studies on the beneficial effects of humor, and to pick up some practical suggestions on how to weave humor into the fabric of your life.

*Humor is the good natured side of a truth.*

— Mark Twain.

*Why don't you stop?*

— Lenny Bruce.  
*Comic at the Palladium*

But humor has its limits, too. If you happen to be taking some time off from your mischief marketing campaign, for example, and if some excessively cheerful idiot happens to come up to you with, “Don’t worry! Be happy!” just acknowledge them courteously, take a deep breath — and run for your life.

#### **IV. Thou shalt not bear false witness for thine offering**

In other words, don’t lie.

When we discuss the Vulcan Tactic, we’ll learn that, although you should never lie ....

*[... Chapter 9 (print edition) continues at this point ...]*

**Know anybody struggling to get started on a shoestring budget?**

**Why not help them get started?**

**Tell them about *Mischief Marketing!***