

A templative tale from
Mischief Marketing

Mischievous Ted Turner

[excerpted from Chapter 7 (print edition) ...]

Timing the Launch of Your Campaign

When is the right time to launch a campaign? If you've planned it meticulously and all systems are go, how quickly should you act?

The following templative tale gives us an insight into timing.

Turnering on a Dime

It is May 21st, 1979. And Ted Turner is wired.

It is just moments before his press conference announcing the startup of CNN, and he's about to market a company that doesn't exist. Of course, that alone would be mischievous enough.

But wait! There's more!

Turner wants to sign the highly credible journalist, Daniel Schorr. And he needs to do it immediately. Now. As in "right this minute." Schorr is essential to the success of his startup. Turner must sign someone credible before this press conference, or his whole project will seem ridiculous.

Here's how he does it.

In 1976 Schorr had resigned from CBS when the network failed to support him in an historic confrontation over freedom of the press. He had refused to reveal his sources at the CIA in the Pentagon papers case. Cited for perjury, Schorr stood his ground and won. "I absolutely will not do anything I don't want to do," he told Turner.

"Nothing I feel might compromise my professional standards." He looked Turner straight in the eye, fully expecting him to blink.


*“Write that down and I’ll sign it,” Turner exclaimed, shoving a piece of hotel stationery into Schorr’s hand.
...[Schorr speaking:] “I became CNN’s first editorial employee, with an ironclad, five-year contract. Probably the tightest anybody had ever seen. Just so Ted could go ahead with that press conference.”*

“When Turner signed that agreement with me,” Schorr continues, “there was no CNN, no structure, no organization, no office, no anything. This guy had the reputation of a buccaneer, but later on I came to understand that he was really serious about doing something worthwhile.”

— Bibb, Porter. *It Ain’t as Easy as It Looks: Ted Turner’s Amazing Story.*
New York: Crown Publishers, 1993, pages 164-165.

Tailoring the Tale

We’re going to cover a critical principle in this book; we’re not going to introduce it or justify it; we’re not going to put it in the front of the book where everyone can see how important it is; we’re just going to drop it in right here.

 **Mischievous Timing Tactic (“Remember the Eleventh Hour Principle”): When you really go out on a limb with a mischief marketing project, your results are likely to bear fruit only at the very last minute — at the eleventh hour.**

This is a general principle in life — not just in mischief marketing — a principle that most people never grasp (sadly) and that almost nobody discusses in the many otherwise fine self-help books that are on the shelves today.

Nature likes to do things at the last minute.

That’s why — in so many myths, stories, plays, movies, fairy tales, and novels — salvation always comes at the last minute. Such stories are exciting, and they ring true to us — why? Because they reflect the truth we know in our hearts. They show us that many important projects really *do* tend to fall into place *only at the last minute*.

Ted Turner knew this. His tale shows that he knew it. He set up a press conference for a company that hardly existed. Then, at the last possible minute, when it must have

seemed to him that he wasn't going to have anything to announce to the press after all, he met Mr. Schorr and signed him right up, no questions asked.

That last-minute, eleventh hour action permitted Turner to make something out of nothing. And he was able to take that action because he instinctively understood the *Eleventh Hour Principle*. He understood that Nature likes to do things at the last minute.

But if you don't grasp this as deeply as Ted Turner did, what happens? You get discouraged, of course. You don't "Go the Distance," as the whispering Voice in *Field of Dreams* says. You give up. You get depressed. You lose energy. You fall into despair. You settle for a job you hate.

You need to understand (and continually remind yourself) that if what you're doing is authentically important, the chances are great that it will all come together for you **only at the last possible minute**.

Great generals understand this very well, which is why you might almost call this "The Cavalry Principle."

At Waterloo, for instance, Wellington had to wait for backups against Napoleon; they came at the last minute, of course.

It almost always happens that way.

Take the guy who wrote the screenplay for the hugely successful film, *Dances with Wolves*. By the time he sold the screenplay, he was living in his car. Another writer on a different popular film was broke, too, when he sold his screenplay. The check arrived in the mail *the same day* he received an eviction notice from the landlord. How's that for last minute?

If you want to make God laugh, tell Him your plans.

If you cannot accept this principle, if you insist on enjoying a certain safety and security, a certain assurance or guarantee that everything will happen according to your

own preconceived schedule, with no surprises, then you don't want to continue reading this book.

👍 **Mischievous Timing Tactic (“Fake it ‘Til You Make It”): If you don't have enough faith to carry you through a project to the very last, despairing, no-time-left minute, act *AS THOUGH* you have enough faith to carry you through a project to the very last, despairing, no-time-left minute.**

People have a lot of serious misunderstandings about the nature of faith. We're not talking about religious faith, of course. Although people have serious misunderstandings about religious faith, too, this is a book about marketing. And anyhow, we already have too much airy-fairy, spiritual-sounding stuff in this section, so we're not going to talk about religious faith. We're just going to talk about faith in general.

One of the problems people have with faith is this: they confuse having great faith with having a big ego.

Ted Turner and Harrison Ford clearly had a lot of faith. But to many people — people generally without faith — they appeared egotistical. **Such critics *always* misinterpret great faith as a type of pride or ego. Always. It is actually their *job* to misinterpret and criticize things in this fashion. We'll talk more about this unusual occupation later. It pays very well sometimes.**

Now, maybe Ted Turner and Harrison Ford really are egotistical. I don't know. I suppose they could be. But let's take another example. Let's take Mother Teresa.

To some of her critics, Mother T — a woman of enormous faith — seemed to be on an ego trip, a power trip. No kidding. Several critics have said such things about her. If you don't believe me, check out a book called *The Missionary Position*.

Of course, you'd have to be a little dull-witted to think that someone who spent almost every day bathing filthy lepers and wiping up vomit and pus from dying people was on an ego trip. But nevertheless, this is what Mother T's critics say about her. Why? Because it's their *job* to say things like that.

Are you reluctant to display true faith in your offering? Are you hesitant to walk around, as Maya Angelou says, "... like I've got oil wells / Pumping in my living room"?

Why?

Is it because you're afraid people will say you're egotistical? Is it because you're scared they'll point at you accusingly and say, "Just Who Do You Think You Are?"

In other words, are you so proud of looking sweet and humble that you must look nice and humble at all costs?

Misunderstandings about the true nature of faith go hand in glove with corollary confusions about the true nature of humility. People often think being humble means pretending you don't have the special talents or gifts you really do have. They think it means putting yourself down, or selling yourself short. But putting yourself down is nothing but false humility. Don't stop yourself from having faith in your offering or in yourself, just because it might look like egotism to someone else.

True, there certainly are people who've been very successful — and who do happen to have big, stupid egos. In fact, some of these people are outright schmucks. There's a well-known Manhattan real estate mogul, for example, whose very existence proves beyond the slightest shadow of a doubt that you don't have to be smart to make a lot of money. He's just a schmuck with a tremendous ego.

But you've got to give the guy at least this much credit: he has HAIR. Oh, excuse me. I mean, he has at least a *kind* of faith.

It may be contaminated with pride, but it *is* a kind of faith. Egotism is perhaps false faith, or simulated faith, but it's at least useful. It's better than nothing. It may well be better than the faith you or I have.

Many good people, wonderful people, are stopped in life just because they don't want to look bad — because they don't want to look prideful. This is a sad thing.

Here would be good place to talk about humility for a moment — true humility.

Do you think Jesus was always humble? Of course he was. Many people think so, anyway. But do you think he always *looked* humble? How about when he was knocking over the tables in the temple? Do you think he looked humble then?

Or how did Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. look when he was marching against civil injustice? Do you think he looked humble at those moments?

Or if you *do* think so (because King was bravely nonviolent) how do you think he looked to the vehement racists standing on the sidelines? Would you say “humble” is the word that leapt into the minds of these white folks while they watched him march? Do you think they turned to each other with twisted faces and exclaimed, “Why, that fricking humble SOB!”

Of course not. They thought King was “real uppity.” They thought he was prideful, egotistical, power hungry, you name it. Read the literature, the news accounts. Read what they said.

No matter that King got beaten up. No matter that Mother T got death threats and was covered with blood and piss half the time. No matter that Jesus got stipped half-naked and nailed to a cross.

To the professionals whose job it is to say, “Just Who Do You Think You Are?” — all these heroes were with a brush that made them look prideful, egotistical, and power hungry. And these pros are very, very good indeed at their job. They can make *anybody* look full of pride and ego — except themselves, of course (they always represent themselves as towering models of humility and “journalistic” honesty).

So what does all this mean for you and me? It means this:

If you think you need to have a big ego to have faith in your offering, forget it. You don’t need to have a big ego to have faith. You don’t need pride. You don’t even need confidence.

You just need two things:

(1) the ability to act **as though** you had a lot of faith; and

(2) the ability to put up with the **critics** whose job it is to accuse you of being egotistical and uppity.

That's all you need.

[... Chapter 7 (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!*