

## The Quicksand of Business

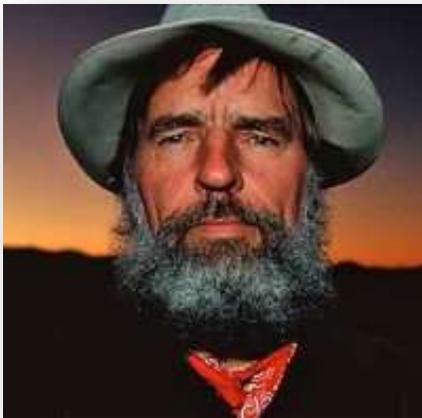
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Even though I work in the world of technology and spend my days investigating the nuances of such arcane topics as femtocell deployment, the economic implications of social media, new advances in optical networking, Big Data, network security and machine-to-machine communications, I am in my heart a biologist. There, I said it. I am consumed by and fascinated with the natural world, a fact that is reflected in my photography. I spend a lot of time on my hands and knees with a macro rig, photographing the things that few rarely see. So it's no surprise that I recently finished reading a book that has been on my stack for more than year called "Desert Solitaire" by Edward Abbey.



*Edward Abbey image courtesy of Wikipedia. All rights reserved.*

Abbey was an author and essayist and one of the first outspoken advocates for the preservation of American western wild lands. He was a noted anarchist who openly and loudly criticized federal environmental and open land policies. Another book, "The Monkey Wrench Gang," is considered required reading by radical environmental organizations.

Between 1956 and 1957 Abbey worked at Arches National Monument in Utah as a seasonal park ranger. He took copious notes and spent long periods driving around the outer reaches of the park, at one point finding himself confronted by a large pool of quicksand. As he pondered his predicament and listened to the friend he was traveling with tell him stories about cars and people being swallowed up by the stuff, I began to ponder something unrelated.

In a recent storytelling workshop for a sales audience, as participants were going around the table introducing themselves and describing their accounts, a single phrase kept popping up in their various descriptions of account status. "I'm deeply embedded in the account" is what I heard over and over again.

But like so many things, I felt as if this phrase was being used without much thought to what it actually means - or what the person using it *wants* it to mean. Clearly they're using it to indicate that they are an inextricable part of the account and can't be dislodged. But are they? I suspect

that in some case there may be other forces at work. Perhaps they are in so deep that they can't see the opportunity forest for the trees. Or they are so deeply buried in the legacy core of the account that they have lost sight of the opportunities that abound around the periphery, the area where things change most often and where opportunities for innovation abound.

The technology industry gave the world a phrase that has become universally applicable to business: "If it ain't broke, don't fix it!" And while there is a certain amount of truth to that, there is also the danger of the scotoma.

We've all had this happen: An old friend comes to visit and as they are walking down the hall from the entryway into the kitchen, the point to a spot on the wall and say, "Blech. What happened there?" Looking to where their finger is pointing you see a large stain on the wall that you haven't noticed in more than a year. Embarrassed, you mumble an excuse, wondering how you let that ugly thing stay there for so long. Why? Because it's a scotoma. A blind spot. Something unpleasant that we learn to ignore.

In one of his many books on managerial leadership Tom Peters offers a variation on the phrase: "If it ain't broke, break it." In other words, don't let blind spots rule your life. Don't become complacent. Question everything. Be prepared for unexpected changes in direction. Remember, chance favors the prepared mind.

Which is why Abbey's ruminations on quicksand made me think about professional selling. Are you deeply embedded in the account, or are you stuck in quicksand? Are you slowly being drawn down to the center of the organization where things move at a glacial pace, or are you staying on the surface, swimming to shore, looking for opportunity?

Funny, isn't it, how something as absolutely as unrelated as quicksand in the desert got me to thinking about sales. That's how good stories are created.

Thanks for reading.