

ZERO DEFECT MARKETING

[Review by James L. Farrell, Ph.D.]

"I had to fire Brad Jones the other day."

That's the opening sentence of *ZERO DEFECT MARKETING* (Lee A. Friedman with David. H. Rothman, Dow Jones-Irwin 1988, 800/323-4560). This High Tech services marketing book then proceeds to describe the game of Snark. A one-hand floating 5-card stud, with all cards kept face down, all bets hidden, and all players wearing masks (there's more but you see the idea). Your gut reaction may be regret - grown-ups should have come up with a better system - but that's another issue. The authors don't claim to describe how the world should be, but how it is.

So what's to do? Many of the tips offered in the book are unequivocal (e.g., you can't sell bibles to preachers if your brochure denies the existence of hell), but others call for some tightrope walking. Publish well-researched papers but don't donate recipes to the other bakers. Diversify but focus your efforts. Don't sit still waiting for business to come to you, but don't wander aimlessly. Don't cheat or lie but, since your competitors might, *do* use every *legitimate* trick. Be aggressive but keep a low-key demeanor. Your intuition is important but maintain a thorough data base.

You need this book, whatever your position may be, to flesh out these and other do's & don't's: how to walk that tightrope if you're a consultant, marauder, former employee of the prospective client, member of a large/medium/small firm, of a techie-run firm ... (plus many more); or if you're fighting off competition from any of these. That data base, for example, includes considerations involving the current state of the economy, of your particular industry, your

prospective client's company or agency, your competitors' organizations, etc. Gather and correlate information from everyone and everywhere (parties and airplanes as well as corridor conversations at conferences). Be an alert listener. Catch that inflection, that nuance. Notice that clue. Write it down - now. Enter it into the computer at the earliest opportunity. Do your homework, and get all troops to do likewise. Give marketing management prominence, not obscurity. No complacency allowed. Stay mindful of "Lee's Law": If anything can deprive you of a contract, it will.

No one claims the ability to prevent awards being "won" by poorer performers, but this book can show how to improve your chances of success. The approach is somewhat reminiscent of the late Robert Ruark's book, *Poor No More*, wherein the main character's grandfather is giving directions on taking control of life. Essentially the message is that, left to its own designs, the world will run (and ruin) your life for you. It's up to each individual to seize control of that life, bend it, manhandle it, and do whatever else is necessary to hold the right course. *ZERO DEFECT MARKETING* advises applying that kind of philosophy to business.

A deeper question is why. At the risk of straying off the main topic or of triggering an unsatisfying response, I presented the authors with a question beyond the book's scope: What do you do after a win? To my relief, the answer was "Deliver. And with quality." So as far as they're concerned, the chase may resemble a game with crazy rules but its sequel shouldn't. How does this spell r-e-l-i-e-f? That is left as an exercise for the reader.