

Want to be an industry expert? Make this one principle your entire business model

 By [Douglas Kruger](#)

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'To get out, you must go in.' 'The way forward is behind you.' 'Less is more.'

Some goals require what seems like contradictory behaviour. Becoming a venerated thought-leader in your industry is one of them.

On the surface, you need to attract tribes of believing followers. After all, without followers, you are not, by definition, a thought-leader, and when you are not perceived as a thought-leader, you have to fight for every scrap of business, introducing yourself anew with every encounter, establishing credibility each time. Position yourself as an icon, however, and the dynamic reverses: They know who you are, they have to have you, and the deals, the media and the publicity start coming to you.

Yet, ironically, the worst thing you can do in your pursuit of iconic industry status is to 'try to attract followers.'

Focusing on mass popularity often backfires. It can result in perceptions of your personal brand as something of a hype show, a travelling circus, a caravan tour of sneaky, snake-oil solutions. It's all about 'you,' and it runs the risk of being seen as disingenuous.

Pulling a Kim...

The Kardashians have been caught out once or twice with this dynamic. A tragedy occurs somewhere in the world, and the quick-typing celeb-sisters send each other tweets, urging, 'Get on top of this one. It's going to be huge!' The tweet is then accidentally sent out in public, and the resultant embarrassment shows them up for fame-seekers, rather than genuine advocates. It becomes clear that they care less about the cause at hand than about having their names plastered all over it.

That may not be a problem when your goal is to appear on the cover of *Heat*. But if you're shooting for *Forbes*, it's a different matter entirely.

Here's an alternative approach with a little more character, and a great deal more business value:

Use the 'One Dependent Pupil' business model

Instead of trying for mass appeal, try for complete and utter relevance... to a single follower. Here's how it works: Picture a

single person - one iconic representation - who looks to you as a thought leader.

Think of her as uniquely interested in your specific insights and ideas. She is deeply invested in doing what you say, because she truly believes it will work. This is a serious-minded person who sees you as the solution. She will follow you, recommend you, learn from you and implement your ideas in order to progress in her own world.

Now make the situation harsh. Remove all other resources from her world.

Pretend that her access to knowledge, information, industry insight and know-how, solutions, paths and plans relies totally and utterly on your input. You are her designated thought-leader and there is no other. If you don't perform, she fails. If you don't teach, her growth slows to a halt. You are her resource.

A different level of duty

Think of the obligation such a model places upon you to serve, the switch it creates from hype to service. Think of how important it is that you are ethical and effective, and that your efforts genuinely add value, rather than cynically focusing upon your own importance.

This model forces you to become less *circus* and more *guide*, less *bull-horn announcer* and more *thoughtful coach*.

Based on this approach, you will be forced to ask yourself a number of questions. For instance: Are you producing enough content to address her range of needs? Are you writing useful articles, blogs or books, often enough for her to genuinely grow? Is your thought-leadership output focused around her benefit, or around advertising yourself? Are you genuinely her solution to a degree that you can feel proud of?

Start by understanding your pupil's goals

To achieve your goal of industry fame, you need to help your pupil to achieve what she wants. So, what *does* she want? An excellent starting point is to go in search of her pain. What are her difficulties? What is she struggling with? What keeps her up at night and causes her grief?

Solve these problems, untie these knots, and you will take on hero status in her world. Coincidentally, articles, books and speeches that focus on 'solving pain' tend to perform extremely well. Not only is it an ethical way of practicing your business, but you will build the kind of genuine reverence and referrals of which experts are made.

So the next time you think about publicising yourself or your business, try this approach: Rather than focus on yourself, focus on a single follower. Focus on that follower's pain. Angle your messaging in such a way as to solve that follower's most pressing problem. *Voila*, you are a thought leader, and your tribe will start to grow.

Now repeat the process, regularly, and solve as many problems as you can identify. In no time at all, the individuals whose lives you have genuinely touched will become the tribes of believing followers you need.

'One dependent pupil.' Give this idea centrality in your world. All else will follow.

ABOUT DOUGLAS KRUGER

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