

Brand You: Shut Up

I have a really, really important message to deliver. Shut up.

I happen to be a reader of thrillers, probably too many thrillers. One of my favorite authors, if not my favorite, is a guy by the name of Charles McCarry. And one of my favorite books about a protagonist named Paul Christopher is called *Christopher's Ghosts*. Christopher is a CIA guy and at one point, this is the comment that McCarry makes: "Christopher had learned when he was very young that if he kept quiet, the other person would fill the silence." Then Christopher himself goes on: "Everyone has a story to tell, if only you have the patience to wait for it and not get in the way of it."

Now, I think it's terrific advice if you're a CIA agent, but probably not that many are watching us today. I think it's terrific advice for every manager and every non-manager and particularly every human being who has ever been or will ever be on a sales call. Particularly sales people: You've got something you want to say, you really believe in the product, and all of those are wonderful things. And so, you absolutely run roughshod over the other person.

It takes patience to shut up, but it takes something more than just what to me seems like a simple word called "patience." Shut up means allowing embarrassing silences to take place upon occasion. But I happen to agree with this McCarry-Christopher connotation of, if you are quiet long enough, the other person, even if they are a "silent type," will come through and ask a question or reveal a feeling.

So listening and strategic listening are important, as I've said at times in the past, but something that's even more important is shut up (and stay shut up) for what will probably be, for most of you and certainly would be for me, a very uncomfortably long period.